

Toward the Revitalization of Newton Centre

Combined Group Two and Three Report Newton Centre Task Force



sketch by Mongkol Tansantisuk

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Under separate cover, an Appendix has been prepared which contains the various Subcommittee Reports and other additional information that form the basis of this Report. For more information, please refer to that document.

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Executive Summary

Toward the Revitalization of Newton Centre

Combined Group Two and Three Report Newton Centre Task Force

Our Groups envision a Newton Centre that will be a model of 21st Century suburban village revitalization, regaining its historic scale, charm, and character – a community that has a “heart” and a “sense of place”.

Our vision consists of three primary objectives:

- We seek to create an interconnected village center, joining the three separate shopping areas of Newton Centre with an active focus, replacing what is now a separating element – an asphalt parking lot.
- We seek a mix of mutually-reinforcing businesses, residences, and community facilities, attracting people to its shops, social venues, and cultural activities.
- We seek physical improvements within existing business zones and the adjoining publicly-owned land, making the Centre pedestrian friendly, interesting and beautiful – a place where people want to visit, meet friends, and enjoy diverse activities.

To make our vision a reality, the Revitalization Plan calls for the following actions:

Land Use Recommendations

- Transform the Newton Centre Triangle, removing the surface parking lot and creating an all-season focus for public activity, consisting of:
 - An active public plaza, on the east end, for civic events and informal gathering during pleasant weather, containing an attractive fountain, seating groupings, space for festivals, art displays, and craft fairs, and a wintertime skating rink.
 - A signature building in the center of the Triangle, containing restaurants, retail shops, spaces for cultural, educational, and recreational activities, and an enclosed passage from Langley Road to Beacon Street.
 - The existing tranquil garden, the Newton Centre Green (Leo Levy Park), on the west end of the Triangle, with lawns, flower beds, trees, and shrubbery.
- Make comprehensive streetscape improvements with landscaping, shade trees, attractive lighting, street furniture, and decorative paving on widened sidewalks, planted medians, underground utilities, and raised pedestrian crossings.
- Allow construction of up to 150 housing units, consistent with the recommendations of Newton’s Comprehensive plan to meet the needs of households of various income and age groups and to take advantage of Newton Centre’s lifestyle offerings and convenient public transportation, following smart growth principles.
- Encourage Newton Centre commercial property owners to upgrade their locations, using presently underutilized space within Newton Centre’s commercial area to-

expand retail commercial space by up to 20 percent, in accord with Newton's Comprehensive Plan's build-out analysis.

- Establish a Newton Centre Zoning Overlay District that will give private property owners incentives to execute high-quality, energy-efficient development within specified design standards and sustainability guidelines without excessive regulatory burdens. The overlay district regulations would call for consolidation of land parcels, mixed uses, building heights comparable to the Centre's historic buildings, attractive and durable materials, interior open courtyards, pedestrian walkways, and flexible provisions for parking.
- Sponsor studies toward achieving improved traffic routing, perhaps with urban roundabouts (at Beacon and Centre Streets and at Beacon Street and Langley Road) to accommodate smooth movement of local- and through-traffic and to facilitate pedestrian circulation between Newton Centre's business blocks.
- Plan parking spaces to replace the parking being displaced from the Centre Triangle and additional spaces to meet growing needs over time:
 - On street for short term parking, and
 - In peripherally-located parking structures for longer term parking.

Financing Recommendations

- Set up a District Improvement Financing (DIF) plan, taking advantage of the future tax revenue potential of new construction to finance bond-based public improvements without affecting the City's bond rating.
- Encourage Newton Centre property owners and tenants to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) to take responsibility for maintenance of sidewalks and other public areas and for programming of Newton Centre village activities, utilizing City services and funds raised by the BID.
- Investigate Transport-Oriented Development Funds (TOD) and numerous other possible means of financing Newton Centre improvements.
- Assure that parking improvements to be made will be self-financing.

Management Recommendations

- Establish a Parking and Traffic Advisory Group and/or a Parking Authority for professional management of parking and to facilitate financing.
- Set up a Newton Centre Advisory Commission consisting of Aldermen, commercial property owners, merchants, and residents, to plan and guide the ongoing revitalization of Newton Centre.
- Initiate a mitigation program:
 - To replace parking removed from the Triangle and elsewhere during the renovation process,
 - To minimize disruption to current businesses during construction activity, and
 - To facilitate potential relocation and expansion opportunities within the Centre resulting from new development.

Toward the Revitalization of Newton Centre

Combined Group Two and Three Report

I. VISION STATEMENT

Our vision for the future of Newton Centre is an integrated, active, pedestrian-friendly village center. One that takes advantage of its economic opportunities and better serves its various stakeholders. One that attracts people from surrounding areas to shop, socialize, and learn. We envision a Newton Centre that will be a model of 21st century development while regaining its historic scale, charm, and character. We want a community that has a “heart” and a “sense of place.”

Decisions about the desirable scale of the buildings and activities in Newton Centre govern discussion of the revitalization. In physical terms, we aim to achieve a scale consistent with Newton’s historical image and consistent with existing buildings along Union Street and on the east side of Centre and Centre Green Streets. In economic terms, our objective is to have enough pedestrian traffic and activity to support locally oriented-business as well as “destination” shops. In social terms, we want to see a village center that attracts nearby residents to its shops, social venues, and cultural activities. *We do not advocate enlarging the footprint of Newton Centre’s business area.*

We seek to rebuild an interconnected village center with a mix of mutually reinforcing businesses, residences, and community facilities. Rather than continue to encourage additional auto-oriented development or allow the construction of a large commercial center in Newton Centre, we prefer growth patterns that will enhance the quality of life, improve the pedestrian experience, and maximize environmental sustainability. If we do nothing, we risk watching the village center be shaped by inappropriate development. Instead, we hope to guide the growth of Newton Centre along socially desirable, economically responsible, and environmentally sustainable paths.

Our vision of Newton Centre includes:

- Transformation and development of the public areas including the Centre Triangle to provide a central focus, to better knit the elements of the district together, to provide a richer and more comfortable pedestrian experience, provide better defined and more usable public space, and improved and more varied commercial outlets.
- An increase in housing (up to 150 units, as recommended in the Newton Comprehensive Plan) providing housing opportunities for people of all income levels who want to live in a vibrant center and who are otherwise underserved in our community. With more residents in the central area of Newton Centre, we envision more people on the sidewalks and in the shops during the day and in the evening, revitalizing the area.
- A commercial district with a wide mix of retail stores focused on the desires of the surrounding neighborhood. This implies new retail space with in-fill construction on

presently underutilized sites or new residential-over-retail buildings that are suitable for a variety of neighborhood-oriented and specialty businesses.

- Improved traffic flows with parking moved out of the Centre Triangle to the periphery of the business area.
- Improved pedestrian passageways, some lined with shops to link Newton Centre's shopping areas, parking, and public transportation.
- Improved outdoor environment, with underground utilities, wider sidewalks, improved signage and lighting, new landscaping and street furniture, and a park/plaza area focused around an attractive fountain in the Triangle.
- Growth that reflects the environment imperatives of our generation, following guidelines for sustainable development.
- Excellence in place-making, manageable change, and empowered property owners. A zoning Overlay District will give property owners design guidelines and the ability to execute our vision of high-quality development without excessive regulatory burdens.

To make our vision a reality, we must:

- Establish a public-private partnership for Newton Centre, guided by a Newton Centre Advisory Commission.
- Carry out professional traffic studies aimed at reducing traffic congestion and implement their conclusions on traffic routing and control.
- Establish a Parking Authority that can finance and build convenient parking structures to replace parking displaced from the Triangle and to meet growing needs, without encroaching on residential neighborhoods.
- Modify zoning requirements under a zoning overlay district to encourage and guide high quality development on private property.
- Provide incentives to create housing for a broad range of income and demographic groups over retail stores in renovated old buildings and in new structures.
- Encourage and provide incentives for development leading to a more suitable mix of retailers as well as cultural and educational institutions. We hope to see locally-oriented businesses like specialty groceries, flower shops, cheese shops, and book stores.
- Take advantage of "smart growth" funding and related financial support for planning, infrastructure support, and on-going expenses.
- Encourage business owners to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) to help finance maintenance and street improvements.
- Organize a District Improvement Financing (DIF) program to use increases in tax assessment value for financing of public improvements.
- Plan carefully to mitigate the impact of construction on business and households.
- Establish an Advisory Commission and a Parking and Traffic Advisory Board.

II. CONSISTENCY WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Our plan is consistent with several goals of the City's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Land Use, Housing and Economic Development sections of the Comprehensive Plan all reference potential development in the City's village centers. The Comprehensive Plan states:

"A strong case can be made for moderate growth in some [larger village centers]... and change in the balance of uses in others. Providing incentives for the creation of more multifamily housing in the larger centers deserves serious consideration. So does the application of a more proactive approach to planning. It is appropriate for the City to encourage the uses and design criteria it deems preferable while discouraging those which are not." (Land Use Section p. 3-31)

"One story buildings are often inefficient and a waste of expensive land so should generally be discouraged in village centers." (Land Use Section p. 3-32)

"The City needs to look at each of the larger [village] centers and develop a plan to enhance it. One size does not fit all; but certain facts are clear. Existing parking patterns and locations are not optimal. Parking in those locations should be shared or otherwise consolidated. The elimination of on street parking in selected locations would also do much to improve traffic flow." (Land Use Section p. 3-31, 3-32)

"Improve parking in village centers." (Economic Development Section p. 6-7)

"Residential development that is well located in relationship to schools, commercial services, large employers and existing patterns of residential type and character benefit the City in multiple ways" (Housing Section p. 5-14)

"Housing retained or developed in or near village centers supports village businesses, and having a broad array of village services within walking distance benefits residents. That linkage strengthens the vitality and quality of life for the (entire) area." (Housing Section p. 5-14)

"Plan the renewal of village centers, aiming to provide vibrant attractive village centers serving the adjacent residential communities." (Economic Development Section p. 6-7)

"Attract people into the village centers at off-hours by developing cultural facilities focused on the local community -- small theaters, art galleries etc. -- and maintaining local parks with improved facilities such as public gardens, outdoor cafes, bandstands..." (Economic Development Section p. 6-7)

"Encourage mixed-use in the village centers by promoting housing above retail. Increasing density allowing mixed use developments in the village centers would increase the population with walking distance and as a result would likely expand the available range of goods and services offered there. It would also increase the stock of housing located close to employment centers and public transportation." (Economic Development Section p. 6-7)

"Consider the designation of overlay districts to regulate land use in village centers." (Economic Development Section p. 6-7)

Our plan for Newton Centre advocates these ideas. Over the past three years, the Newton Centre Task Force has worked diligently to create a plan specific to this area. Our plan includes Public and Private Property Design Guidelines for the Centre as well as options for improving the parking and traffic situation there. We also recommend adding up to 150 new housing units in Newton Centre mostly above ground-level retail and approximately 140,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. Finally, we seek more diverse, but complementary uses rather than have the Centre continue to be dominated by banks, beauty salons, and a parking lot as it is today. To achieve these goals we recommend adoption of an overlay zone for Newton Centre that provides incentives for desirable development patterns, designs and uses.

III. BENEFITS OF A REVITALIZED NEWTON CENTRE

Our plan is a winning proposition for everybody involved --- property owners, business owners, residents, and the City itself.

Property Owners

Much of the development we envision for Newton Centre will be carried out by private parties, who will be able to construct mixed-use buildings containing apartments and commercial space under modified zoning regulations. Private sector development will be justified by the economic gains to the property owners from better use of their properties.

Business Owners

New and existing businesses in the Centre will also benefit from this plan. We recommend constructing one or more strategically located parking garages to provide better parking options for both employees and customers. Also, a more attractive streetscape, wider sidewalks, pedestrian pathways and additional public amenities will improve the overall pedestrian experience and bring more foot traffic to the area.

Residents

Newton Centre residents should notice less cut through traffic on residential streets under this plan. We call for the possible installation of roundabouts at the two major intersections in the Centre as well as other smaller traffic improvements. It is anticipated that these improvements will keep the traffic moving along the main streets rather than through small neighborhood streets. Residents will also enjoy their close proximity to a more walkable, dynamic village center.

City of Newton

A rough estimate indicates that the City of Newton could net an additional \$1.5 million dollars in annual tax revenue from the development we encourage in Newton Centre. As part of this development, we recommend approximately 140,000 sq. ft. of new commercial space and 150 new housing units that can provide housing for people who are underserved in our community, particularly downscaling empty nesters, starter families and workplace housing and will help Newton reach its goals with respect to affordable housing.

IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Newton Centre developed as a true village center, an integrated commercial and residential area, in the late 19th and early 20th century. It was one of the first railroad suburbs. People walked from one errand to another and from home to the train and back. Newton Centre had a mix of uses: social, business, cultural, and educational. It was essentially a transit-oriented development pattern that is now called *smart growth*. Historically this type of development was built out of necessity; today, we aspire to build it by choice.

Many of the Centre's prominent buildings were three or four stories high, ranging from 40 to 60 feet in height, comparable to the churches and the Victorian and Queen Anne homes in the immediate vicinity. A number of these beautifully proportioned and richly designed buildings still exist in Newton Centre.

As older commercial buildings were demolished; replacement buildings had only one or two floors--many originally intended as temporary fill-ins, so-called "taxpayers" buildings. Tax assessment was based on the number of floors. Parking regulations required all new developments to have "on-site" parking. This limited the size of the buildings since ground area necessary to meet the parking requirement occupied the majority of the site.

Over time, the growing use of automobiles reshaped development patterns in Newton Centre. In the late 1950s early 1960s, the Mason School in the Centre Triangle was demolished. A new, modern school was built outside of the commercial district. Rather than replace the school at its original location with another facility that would contribute to the Centre's vitality, the old school site was converted into a parking lot. This was expected to be a temporary use meant to last only until Newton revised its zoning code to reflect modern needs and requirements. Instead, this "temporary" use has lasted for over 50 years!

Also in this period, several homes in other central locations including Pelham and Pleasant streets were demolished and replaced with surface parking. Roads and turning radii were enlarged to make the area easier to navigate by car and truck, but in turn made it harder to navigate by foot. Today, Centre and Beacon Streets, the main thoroughfares in Newton Centre, carry large volumes of traffic. Much of that traffic simply passes through the area. Some shoppers who do drive to the Centre do not park once to do multiple errands, but use their cars to go from one side of the Centre to the other. The

result has been a village divided into three separate strip malls lacking common focus or connection, as it remains today.

The mix of commercial and other uses has also changed drastically over the years. Residential use in the central area of the village declined and was replaced largely by offices. Many stores serving local everyday needs have been replaced by banking offices and beauty salons that draw customers from a wide area. There are few educational, cultural, or social venues. As a consequence, Newton Centre has lost its identity as a multi-dimensional center for the community. Rather, it has become a central location, drawing customers from far away, principally for destinations like banking, grooming, and selective fashion shopping. Numerous restaurants and fast-food shops round out the offerings. Newton Centre is no longer a village center; it has become just another commercial crossroads dominated by shops, banks, and offices.

NEWTON CENTRE, TODAY

Intersection of Beacon and Sumner: A view to the fire station from Lyman Street



The Parking Lot in the Centre Triangle: A View from Lyman Street southward

The deterrents to quality new development in Newton Centre range from questions of economic viability, transportation and parking, to zoning regulations.

- The lack of multi-family housing in the Centre and the emphasis on auto transportation has adversely affected the economic viability of traditional locally-oriented stores such as groceries, flower shops, cheese shops, hardware stores, and small bookstores.
- Major traffic arterials have attracted “destination” businesses and offices.
- Pedestrian traffic is discouraged by the distance between the shopping areas and by heavy traffic loads on the main thoroughfares.
- Zoning provisions that a) prevent mixed use, b) require low buildings by right (or with special permits) and c) require on-site parking have discouraged redevelopment.
- The small parcel size and multiple ownership of commercial sites have also made mixed-use development difficult.

It may just be a matter of time, however, before a group of owners agrees to work together or a single individual assembles multiple parcels, and proposes a significant project with little or no public guidance. Under Chapter 40B¹, a substantial housing development could be built without public input. One may also remember that current zoning in the business area of Newton Centre (BU1 and BU2) is similar to the zoning that existed on much of Boylston Street and, using the Special Permit process, led to the development of the Atrium and the proposed Chestnut Hill Square development. Patterns of growth will ultimately reflect economic and social developments in the area, but they may be influenced to reflect public preferences by thoughtful forward-looking planning and appropriate incentives.

It is now time to correct the mistakes of the past and to plan improvements that will set the character and quality of the Centre for the future and successfully transform Newton Centre into a lively new village center. Such development should not and cannot be imposed on the community. Growth and change will occur in any case. We hope to set up a framework that, with public and private cooperation, will lead to a revitalized Newton Centre.

Let us act now to guide positive development!

V. THE POTENTIALS OF THE CENTRE TRIANGLE

The Centre Triangle lies in the middle of Newton Centre and is critical to the revitalization of the Centre. We must make it, once again, the heart of Newton Centre: the focus of the activities that draw pedestrians; an open space, attractive winter and summer, and, importantly, the link that pulls together the separate business blocks to make them into a community.

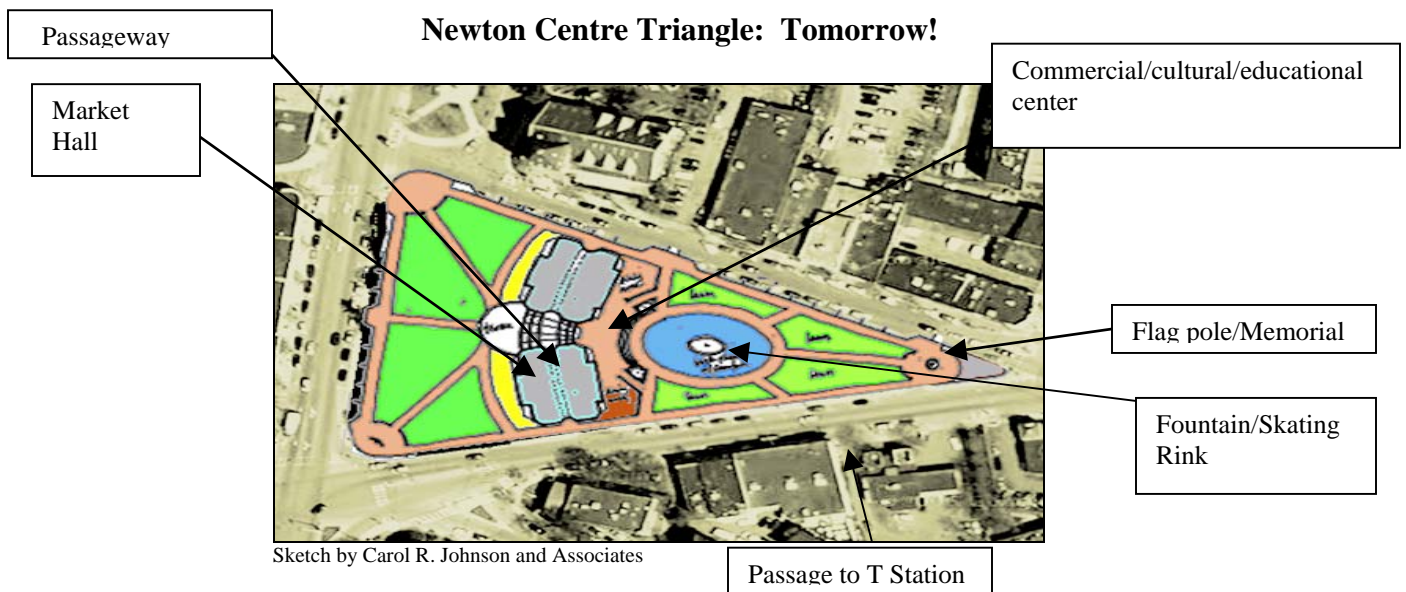
¹ M.G.L Chapter 40B: See Appendix

Today, the Centre Triangle is a separating element. It serves as a parking lot for customers and employees of the strips of shops, restaurants, and banks in the central area of Newton Centre. Its entrance and exit locations contribute to traffic congestion by mixing mid-block turning movements with through traffic. Access from parking to and from the shops is hazardous to pedestrians who are induced to jaywalk across the surrounding busy streets



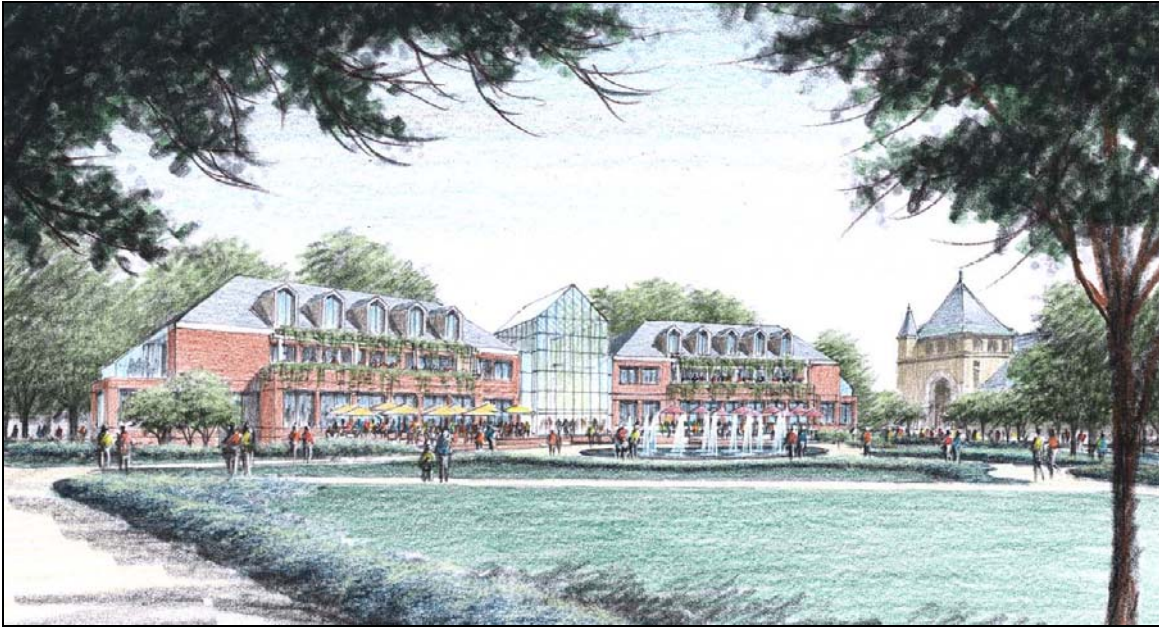
Newton Centre Triangle—Today!

Tomorrow the Centre Triangle could be an island of excitement and interest at the heart of the Newton Centre community. By relocating the spaces in the current parking lot to nearby locations and by separating short-term convenience parking from long-term employee parking, the Triangle would be transformed into a gathering place. Graced with an attractive building and active open space, the Centre Triangle area would become a visually attractive and socially active space. It would link to but not encroach on the green park along Centre Street and provide an interior pathway among the surrounding retail areas.



A building for community and shopping activities would replace the parking lot along with a plaza containing a fountain/skating rink and landscaped open space. Active use landscaping at the eastern end would complement the tranquil garden of the western end. A terrace would be built on the eastern side of the building overlooking the fountain. Plantings, and plentiful outdoor seating would be provided. Convenient pedestrian paths would cross the Triangle, allowing people to walk easily between the Langley Road, Centre Street, and Beacon Street blocks.

Most important to making the Triangle an effective focus for pedestrians is the building shown on the map. It would assemble a variety of shops on the first floor to serve the local community. It would also contain a market hall/social center, a place for people to congregate, and indoor and outdoor cafés depending on the season. Cultural and educational activities (including perhaps the All Newton Music School which, in the past, expressed interest -- see letter in the appendix), which could draw people into Newton Centre, may be accommodated on the upper stories.



Sketch by Mongkol Tansantisuk

A new structure linking the Beacon/Union Street Shops with the Langley Street Shops

A protected passageway, perhaps open in the summer, will make for easy connections.

An Indoor Passageway



The building should be on a scale with the beautifully detailed buildings along the Centre greens and with future development around the Triangle. The size of the building will depend on what is necessary to meet the commercial and civic uses envisioned, perhaps 30,000 to 60,000 sq. ft. Financial considerations are also a significant factor: the building's revenues must cover costs and maintenance as well as perhaps contribute to the beautification of the rest of the Centre Triangle.

Sketch by Mongkol Tansantisuk



We prefer that the center of the building be transparent (glass enclosed) while reflecting the beautiful stone and brick structures on both sides. As is shown on the drawing, one possibility is two structures connected by a glass roofed market hall.



A plaza with a fountain and a gathering place would occupy the rest of the Triangle. In the summer, this outdoor space would provide a location for public gatherings, meetings, and, perhaps, just eating ice cream. In the winter, the building would provide an interior passageway from Langley Road to Beacon Street and the fountain could be adapted to a skating rink.

Recommendations for the Newton Centre Triangle

We view the redesign of the Centre Triangle, now occupied by a parking lot, as critical to providing Newton Centre with a central focus. We need to replace the parking lot that currently divides the three existing retail components of Newton Centre, with active uses that unite it. A new building should be built in the general location of the old Mason school east of the existing Centre Green. Its scale should be consistent with the existing historic buildings that flank it along the east side of Centre Street. The building's uses should include ground-floor retail and restaurant space, room for cultural and educational activities on the upper stories and a publicly accessible auditorium for performances.

The Centre Triangle building should also offer covered pedestrian passageways from the businesses on Langley Road to those on Beacon Street. Its glass-enclosed center should provide a view from Centre Street eastward through the building and into a new, active Centre Triangle park. The park should have terraces and landscaped open space.

VI. LAND USE RECOMMENDATION BY SUB-AREA

Our Property Use Subcommittee concluded that in the business areas of Newton Centre land is underutilized and poorly allocated from economic as well as design perspectives. Large parts of Newton Centre, particularly the northern part of the block between Langley and Lyman Streets, are devoted to surface parking. The very center of the village, the Centre Triangle, is also the site of a barren parking lot as noted above.

One- and two-story business buildings line the major streets of the Centre, their height limited by zoning regulations on density (FAR) and building heights and the on-site

parking requirement. Pedestrian connections between the various sectors of business in Newton Centre are dangerous and inconvenient because of distance, street width, and a large volume of traffic.

There is little housing, so that Newton Centre's business area lacks an active resident population. The lack of housing also reflects regulations requiring parking on site and difficulties of creating mixed-use buildings without going through the onerous special permit process that is too time-consuming and costly for small scale development.

Increases in housing and retail business are desirable in Newton Centre to improve vibrancy and the village character of the community. In the following section, we present a strategic discussion of land-use in various areas of Newton Centre to consider possibilities for its improvement. The discussion will focus first on publicly-owned areas and then on privately-owned properties.

Strategy for Newton Centre

- **Create a Core:** It is important to cluster the retail, dining, and public service facilities in Newton Centre and allow them to be mutually supportive to create a synergy among uses. The Centre Triangle is critical in the re-establishment of a vibrant village center.
- **Create a Pedestrian Environment:** Provide ample sidewalks, benches, and small courtyards to enable people to combine shopping, dining, and socializing.
- **Make the Existing Greens a Part of the Pedestrian Experience:** The present Newton Centre Greens are an important resource. They must be better linked into the future village center.
- **Design a Management Organization and Plan:** Create an organization of City Aldermen, property owners and merchants and surrounding residents to advise and guide development. A Newton Centre Advisory Commission would provide an ongoing forum for guiding and evaluating Newton Centre development.
- **Maintain the Village Centre.** Maintenance of streets and other public properties, a traditionally public responsibility has often proved to be inadequate. A cooperative organization of Newton Centre businesses could assume responsibility for some items of maintenance such as sidewalk snow removal, trash removal, and similar housekeeping items paid for by a Business Improvement District (BID).

Central Area Improvements – Public Properties

The key parcels, the Centre Triangle and the Greens are City-owned. Our recommendations include:

- As stated previously, replace the parking in the Triangle with a Centre Triangle building and park, attracting pedestrians to active retail and service establishments and public uses. Improvements in the Triangle, devoted to retail, restaurants, and public spaces can act as a central focus. Newton Centre will have an attractive central core with a wide range of activities. This is critical to achieving a vibrant village center.

- Renovate Newton Centre’s major green areas along Centre Street.
 - The northerly green space with the flagpole (along Centre Green Street) is in need of landscaping improvement. The daily maintenance of this area could be assumed by the BID.
 - The southerly green space (Levy Park), situated in the Core Area, is an active park used for the annual harvest festival as well as for recreation. Newton Pride, which currently provides a spectacular and diverse flower garden, would continue to maintain their area. The pedestrian walkways can be integrated with the Centre Triangle building so that the entire plot bounded by Centre Street, Beacon Street and Langley Road will function as an integrated area.
- Construct parking structures to replace the parking spaces lost by removing parking in the Triangle. The new parking structures would provide employee and commuter parking and would also provide for growth as activity in Newton Centre increases. Locate the parking structures at the edge of the business area encouraging traffic to avoid the main Newton Centre intersections and to discourage parking on neighborhood streets.
- Limit on-street parking in the central area of Newton Centre to short term (one hour maximum). Convenient street parking should be short-term; to serve the various short-term uses such as visits to banks, coffee shops, drug stores, and specialty groceries, etc.
- Widen sidewalks to create pedestrian-friendly areas and allow for sidewalk cafes on Langley Road, Union Street and Beacon Street.
- Organize Langley Road as a site for weekend and evening “street events”. Closing Langley Road between Centre Green Street and Sumner Street on weekends or evenings would create a pedestrian space for street concerts, art displays, health education and similar public oriented events. Removing the curb on the northerly side and defining the travel lane with movable bollards would facilitate this activity.
- Add or replace street trees, benches, pedestrian lighting, street lighting, directional and store location directories, and trash receptacle. Under-grounding of utilities would greatly improve the appearance of the Langley Street business block. Give special attention to providing some type of enclosure to eliminate the clutter from the numerous newspaper dispensers. Consider special sidewalk pavement materials, such as brick to give a special character to these pedestrian walks.
- Make all possible effort to reduce traffic congestion at the two major intersections in Newton Centre. Professional traffic studies will be required to evaluate alternative options. One promising possibility is the construction of small “urban round-about” at the Centre/Beacon and Langley/Beacon/Sumner intersections. An alternative is a one-way traffic scheme. It is not the intention to add traffic capacity but to keep the existing traffic moving at a constant but moderate speed.
- Provide clearly-marked mid-block pedestrian crosswalks to accommodate convenient and safe pedestrian movement.

- Provide a landscaped median between traffic lanes where possible on Centre Street to facilitate pedestrian crossing and provide an appropriate entry to the Village Centre.
- Provide a landscaped median, street width permitting, on Beacon Street from Grant to Langley/Sumner Streets terminating in a landscaped urban roundabout as an entrance to Newton Centre.

Newton Centre Village Improvements – Private Properties

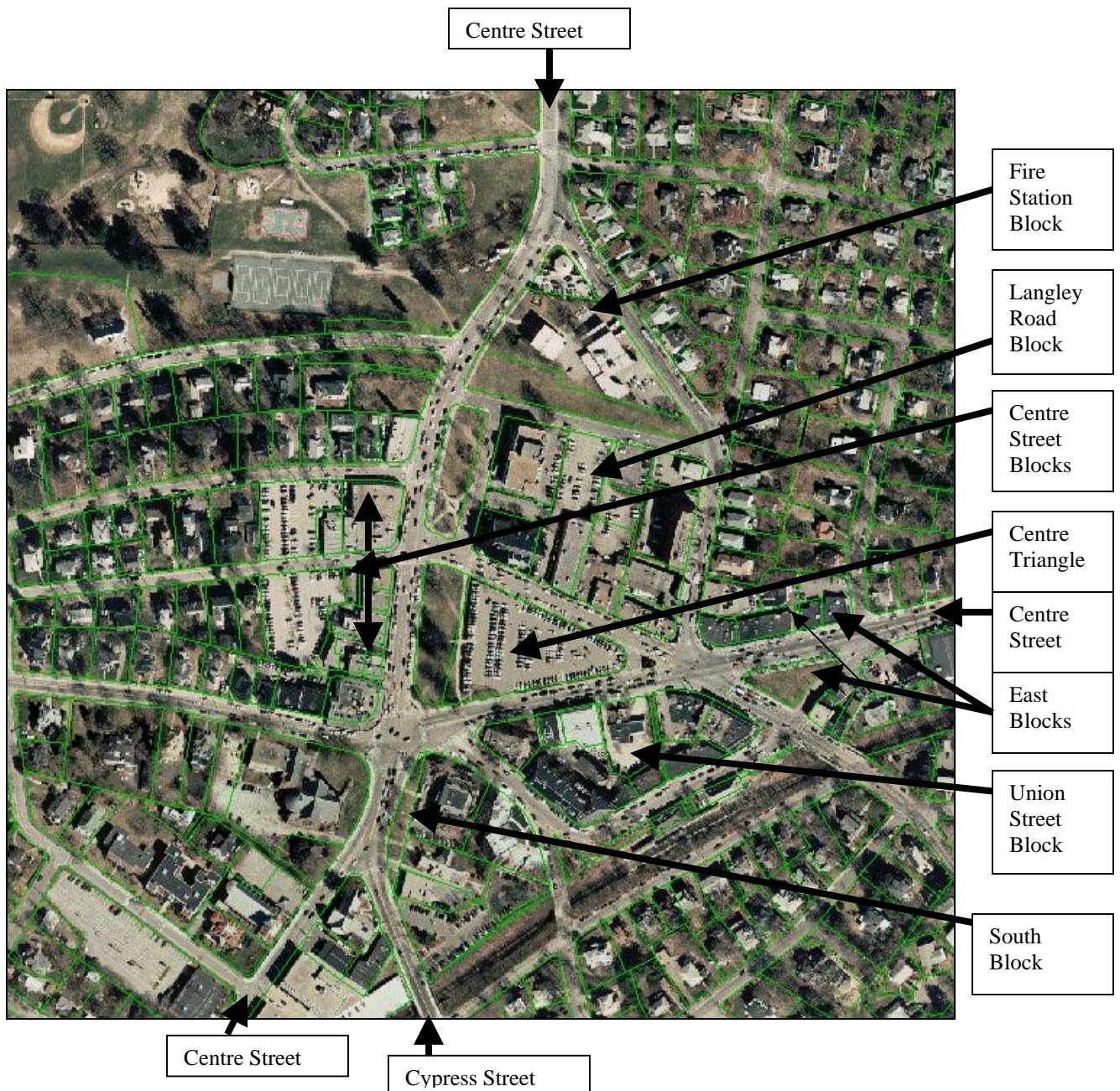
- Small individually-owned parcels lack sufficient scale to permit modern, pedestrian friendly, residential and business development in Newton Centre. Merging of properties or cooperation between owners would improve possibilities for making major improvements.
- In Newton Centre's business area, there are six major separate privately-owned (with exceptions) land areas and some publicly-owned land area. Most privately-owned land comprises numerous parcels and some sites have multiple owners. They are the:

Core Areas

- Langley Road Block bounded by Langley Road, Sumner Street, Lyman Street, and Centre Green Street.
- Union Street Block bounded by Union Street, Langley Road, Beacon Street and Herrick Road.
- Centre Street Blocks – parcels facing Centre Street between Tyler Terrace and Beacon Street.

Transitional Areas

- South Block bounded by Union Street, Braeland Street, MBTA tracks, Cypress Street. And Centre Street.
- East Blocks – parcels lying east of Sumner Street and Langley Road on both sides of Beacon Street.
- Fire Station Block bounded by Lyman Street, Centre Street and Willow Street.



It is important to recognize the different characteristics, location and size of the individual blocks making up the Newton Centre Village. They are very different and demand different criteria.

- The Langley Road Block, Union Street Block and Centre Street Block form the core of Newton Centre. These blocks have the capacity to accommodate substantial development since they are well buffered from the residential neighborhoods. Varied building heights of 3 to 5 floors could be possible.
- The other parcels are transitional blocks between the commercial center and the adjacent neighborhoods. These parcels are suited to lower density commercial re-development and/or housing. Varied building height of 2 to 4 floors are compatible in height to the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Objectives, Restrictions and Guidelines for Private Properties

Actions on the public properties and zoning regulations will provide the framework that will guide and determine the vitality and character of the Newton Centre for many years. Public improvements will be a catalyst for additional private development. Private properties would receive benefits from the public improvements as well as incentives for private owners to undertake long-term property development in keeping with Newton Centre's village character.

This section does not attempt to suggest specific zoning or other changes but provides a broad discussion of possibilities and uses for properties mentioned during the Task Force deliberations.

Changes in the private properties would occur gradually, zoning permitting. While development or redevelopment will be subject to zoning guidelines and design criteria, the decisions to make changes rest with the individual owners who will recognize the advantages of strategic zoning changes and who will see the economic potential of a more active Newton Centre



A Refreshing Terrace

CORE AREAS

Langley Road Block: The north portion of this Block is under developed with buildings and provides parking for approximately 195 cars² as well as service access for individual stores. Redesign of this parking area, along Lyman Street, would be an important consideration in any zoning modification or redevelopment plan.

- The owners of the combined parcels could work with the City to construct a parking garage in this area. Some of it could be on private land and some of it could be on public property along Lyman Street. The aqueduct easement held by the MWRA

² This total includes the spaces for the two banks on the west side but not the parking spaces at the rear of the Newton Community Development Foundation housing on Sumner Street nor the spaces around the small office building at the corner of Sumner and Lyman Streets.

represents a barrier, though not an insurmountable one, to using land immediately north of Lyman Street. The parking structure would provide replacement parking for displaced existing parking as well as parking for any new uses within the Langley Block and the planned uses in the Centre Triangle.

- Mixed-use (retail and housing) along Langley Road with varied height of three to five stories is consistent with neighboring structures. Along the northerly side facing Lyman Street, moderate density residential of two to four floors would serve as a transitional use to the existing homes and apartments along Willow Street with a bonus density to owners who cooperate with the City to provide some parking on the lower levels of the Lyman Street side of their properties.
- Pedestrian pathways should be provided between Lyman Street and Langley Road, especially if a parking structure is located on the north side of Lyman Street. These could provide active uses, retail or restaurants, along at least a portion of this pedestrian way. Pedestrian pathways could vary in width and should have at least one landscaped plaza or “mini-park”. Small-scale retailing may fit well along some of the pedestrian pathways.
- A parking garage along Lyman Street could also provide parking for a mixed-use development. The private developers may satisfy needs for parking by making a financial contribution to the construction of a parking structure.

Union Street Block: The Union Street Block illustrates the potentials of the rejuvenation of Newton Centre. The frontage across from the T-Station contributes to the character of the village community, including a number of attractive small specialty shops.

- This block contains limited parking and service areas. The parking (about 25 cars) is around two new one floor structures, Peet’s Coffee and Sovereign Bank. These two buildings demonstrate the problems with the small parcel size and current development restrictions in the Centre: small buildings with limited parking, laid out in an inefficient manner with multiple street entrances and exits creating congestion on the street and disruption to pedestrian traffic. Mixed use (retail, office and housing) with varied height of three to four floors would be appropriate for any replacement structures.
- Development potential exists on either side of the H. H. Richardson style train station.
- As redevelopment occurs, maintaining the existing pedestrian pathway from Union Street to Beacon Street is important. The portion now passing between the open areas provided by the surface parking might be increased in width. A “mini-park” or small plaza can be provided. Active business uses would face a redeveloped walkway.
- There is a *de facto* second pedestrian way behind the Bank of America building at the corner of Union Street and Beacon Street. Upgrading the passageway and making it permanent would improve pedestrian circulation.

Centre Street Blocks: The City owns property in the rear of the commercial area of these blocks, the Pelham Street and Pleasant Street parking lots. Multiple parcels and depth of parcels presently limit the development opportunities in this location. There are

four sub areas: 1) North of Pleasant Street, 2) between Pleasant Street and Pelham Street, 3) between Pelham Street and the access alley, and 4) parcels facing Beacon Street.

- Mixed use is appropriate for this area which abuts residential use. Construction should be limited to three stories. Any parking structure behind the existing buildings must minimize traffic and visual impact on the adjacent neighborhood.

TRANSITIONAL AREAS

South Block: This area consists of City-owned parcels, the Cypress Street Parking Lot, the old Newton Centre Library structure (now used by the Health Department) and a narrow green strip along Centre Street. Privately-owned are an apartment house and related private parking, a commercial structure between the two City-owned parcels, and the historic Women's Club building, now used for retail and offices (and surrounded by one lane of parking)..

- The City property (existing Cypress Lot) is a one of the suggested locations for a parking garage serving the southern portion of Newton Centre.
- It may be possible to combine portions of the Cypress parking lot, a privately- owned parcel, and the old Newton Centre Library parcel, as a housing site forming a transition between the Newton Centre Core and the residential neighborhoods.
- An extension of a parking structure onto air rights over the MBTA tracks may also be possible and would also serve needs for commuter parking.

East Blocks: The parcels north of Beacon Street are immediately adjacent to a residential neighborhood, so redevelopment would be limited to three story structures. Parking is an issue. It may be possible to use the land to the rear of the buildings facing Beacon in a more effective manner.

- North of Beacon Street, the existing building, used for auto repair, behind the shops and related parking is not a compatible use. The property could provide a small short term parking area to serve neighboring shops.
- The parcels south of Beacon Street are buffered from the residential area by the MBTA tracks and topography so that four-story structures would be appropriate. Existing housing to the east, however, would call for a buffer of residential or open space.
- Parking is limited and curtails any development unless a public/private approach occurs to construct a parking garage south of Beacon Street serving the easterly portion of Newton Centre. This would also provide a parking destination on the east for traffic approaching from that direction.
- South of Beacon Street there are other uses, a gas station and auto service business, which may not be compatible with a pedestrian dominant village center. A parking lot or structure on this property could provide the necessary parking.

Housing and non-retail uses are more appropriate in this area. Multiple parcel ownership may be a deterrent to a comprehensive development of this property.

- The City owns the hillside triangle green (Langley Road and Beacon Street) but the size of the property and its slope stand in the way of alternative use.

Fire Station Block: This block is suited for residential use. It could serve as a transition between the higher density Langley Road Block and the single-family neighborhood to the north and east.

- The current uses on the property consist of the Fire Station, Fire Department Headquarters and Communication Center, and a salon/spa. It may be possible to incorporate a new Fire Station and/or Headquarters/ and Communications Center in a housing complex, but in any case, the function that these facilities provide must be maintained.
- The MWRA easement and underground aqueduct poses a challenge. The use of this property will require agreements with the MWRA or legislative changes.

VII. PARKING

A goal of the Newton Centre Task Force is to improve current parking and traffic conditions and to make sure future development maintains a desirable quality of life for residents and supports the vitality as well as the history of the village center. In addition, our plan for the Newton Centre Triangle (outlined in a previous section) necessitates relocating the parking currently in the Triangle parking lot to other locations in the Centre.

Parking survey data collected by the Parking and Traffic Subcommittee suggest, contrary to intuition, that currently there is usually sufficient parking. But perceptions are different. And while there may be enough physical spaces, the location and management of these spaces causes or exacerbates some tangential problems:

- Driving around to find the "perfect" parking spot in front of your destination contributes to traffic congestion;
- The mix of spaces -- long-and short-term -- is inadequate. As a result long-term users often "feed the meter" in short-term spaces;
- Current parking regulations, that require owners to provide on-site parking, are inconsistent with optimizing land use and pedestrian connections.

Our Groups identified the following objectives to assure that future changes to parking and circulation support these values:

- Eliminate surface parking on the Centre Triangle
- Minimize negative parking and traffic impacts on residents
- Create a more pedestrian-friendly environment
- Make it easier for convenience shoppers to find parking spaces by maximizing short-term parking on the street

- Satisfy needs for employees, shoppers and diners for long-term parking by building parking structures on the periphery, close to each of the principal business areas in the Centre and to public transportation.
- Pursue shared parking where possible
- Eliminate the requirement to provide parking on-site
- Facilitate other modes of transportation besides private cars
- Improve parking operations and maintenance with a new parking management system or a Parking Authority.

Alternative Locations for Parking in Newton Centre

The Subcommittee on Parking and Traffic made extensive studies of the needs for and possibilities for providing additional parking in Newton Centre.

Replacement of the Centre Triangle Surface Parking Lot and Future Parking Demand

Elimination of the Centre Triangle parking lot calls for replacement of 155 short-term parking spaces. Additional spaces can be created by consolidating parking lots on the south side of Lyman Street with the cooperation of property owners. Some of this parking can be replaced on the street, for example, by using diagonal parking, and providing additional parking on Lyman Street but this is likely to be insufficient. Moreover, to meet growing parking needs, it will be necessary to build at least one parking structure.

If “active” business and cultural space is added by locating a building on the Centre Triangle and if, as we anticipate, additional private construction occurs elsewhere, parking demand is likely to increase. The uses and scale of additions will determine future parking needs. These needs will build up gradually as renovation occurs and as activity increases in Newton Centre. Shared parking, between commercial and residential or with neighboring churches, could reduce these requirements.

Street parking options

While the open area of the Centre Triangle is converted into a public gathering space, replacement parking could be located in several places:

- Lyman Street. This street has a low volume and can tolerate delays that may occur with the addition of 35-40 new parking spaces. Because spaces are accessible from the rear of stores and on the perimeter of the center, they should be designated as long-term spaces to improve employee options. If it is not possible to widen Lyman Street to accommodate diagonal parking, consideration could be given to making it a one-way street to accomplish diagonal parking.
- Centre Green Street. This low-volume street can accommodate several diagonal spaces on the west side of the street where there are no curb cuts.

- Centre Street between Gibbs Street and Tyler Terrace. Approximately 8-12 parallel parking spaces can be added. Since they would not be in front of any shops and are peripheral to the center, they could be useful for long-term employee parking.
- Private lots, especially those used by churches and some offices. During construction, these lots could be used temporarily in lieu of spaces displaced in the Centre Triangle lot. A waiver of parking requirements to allow use of church and/or office parking spaces at times when they are not otherwise in use is a possibility. To permanently use these spaces for replacement parking, a change in current zoning is required.
- Langley Road. Diagonal spaces on the north side and elimination of parallel spaces on the south side would not increase the number of spaces, but would place them nearest the stores for easiest access during and after construction. This would be safer for pedestrians because now they often jaywalk if their cars are parked across the street. Since cars backing out of traditional diagonals have limited visibility, for safety reasons, back-in diagonals are sometimes recommended. Back-in diagonal spaces allow drivers to see the street when they exit and also allow for rear loading from the sidewalk.
- The private surface parking lots behind buildings with frontage on Langley Road (and access from Lyman Street). Re-grading and repaving of these sites could result in as many as 50 new parking spaces. Public use of the new spaces would need to be secured and businesses could continue to have use of the spaces for their staff and patrons. Short-term spaces are recommended closest to the shops and long-term spaces designated to the rear of the lots.

Parking garage options

In the longer-term, one or more parking structures will be needed to serve new retail, residential, and cultural uses in Newton Centre, and to accommodate long-term parking. We looked at several locations for these parking structures. In addition to the ones described below, the redevelopment of the Centre Triangle Plaza could also include short-term parking below ground to serve the businesses and educational institutions in the proposed Centre Triangle building. While we do not actively support or oppose this underground parking, we believe that there are more cost-effective locations for a structure elsewhere in the commercial area.

A possible Lyman Street parking structure

An appropriate location for a parking structure on the north side of the Centre is along Lyman Street either adjacent to or within the Langley Road and Fire Station blocks. It could be located either on publicly or privately owned property or some combination of the two. This location provides direct access to existing as well as future uses on the Langley block and could connect to the rest of the commercial district through pedestrian pathways between the Langley Road buildings.

Options to build a structure on public land are limited by placement of the underground aqueduct running parallel to Lyman Street on MWRA property. It will be necessary to

reach agreement with the MWRA for its elimination or its replacement with a smaller steel pipe.³ The City's political leadership has not had discussion with the MWRA Board. Alternatively, it may be possible to get home rule legislation to deal with this issue.

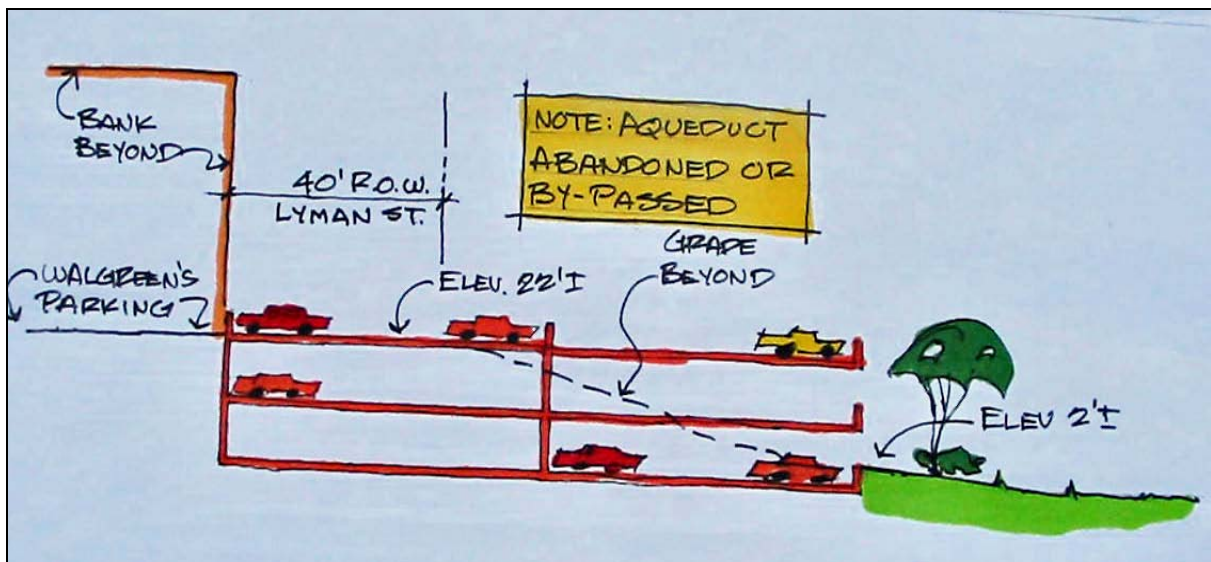
A parking structure could hold as many as 300 cars on two levels (500 cars on three levels in the future) on the steeply sloping site. It would require demolition of a small storage structure behind the fire station. Its capacity would both replace parking lost in the Centre Triangle and meet the future needs of growing business and cultural activity on the north side of Newton Centre.

³ Discussions with the MWRA staff indicate that the pipe is not presently used but remains an alternate in case of need. The MWRA staff stated that they do not have plans to abandon the site in the foreseeable future.



Lyman Street Garage

Lyman Street Parking Structure (facing west) covers the street and slope



We also looked at other possibilities for the Lyman Street site.

- Redevelop and reconfigure the Fire Station block to accommodate a new, modern Fire Station, multi-family housing and a public parking structure. The multi-family housing could be a good transition from the commercial area to the residential neighborhood.
- Collaborate with property owners on the Langley Road block to extend the parking structure onto privately-owned properties. The Langley Road block building owners

and tenants would benefit directly from the parking and would also retain the rights for substantial development under existing or new zoning. In exchange for the right to build a parking structure, the City could adjust zoning requirements and allow additional development along Langley Road. Furthermore, it would appear that housing could be accommodated along Lyman Street to buffer the garage. Shared parking, therefore, is a distinct possibility.

Cypress Street Lot for Longer-Term Parking

The Cypress Street lot is well located to serve people doing business in the south of Newton Centre and those who use the T station. It currently serves both commuters and employees. Additional levels of parking on this site would have minimal impact on residents. Braeland Avenue separates the MBTA tracks from existing residences and there is only one house nearby that faces Braeland Avenue adjacent to the site. In July 2007, MBTA representatives expressed a willingness to work with the City on a plan to build a parking structure on the Cypress Street lot that would extend onto MBTA property and possibly over the T tracks.

A possible design, shown below, retains the surface lot for short-term parking for customers in the area. The structure extends over the tracks and will provide a sound buffer to adjacent businesses and residents. Design of the structure will need to be sensitive to them as well and should include landscaping along Braeland Avenue to complement the streetscape and screen the building. The use of private properties is not needed to construct such a building and access to an adjacent private lot can be retained. The existing pedestrian path to the MBTA station would remain in its current location. This structure could accommodate 200 spaces on two levels.



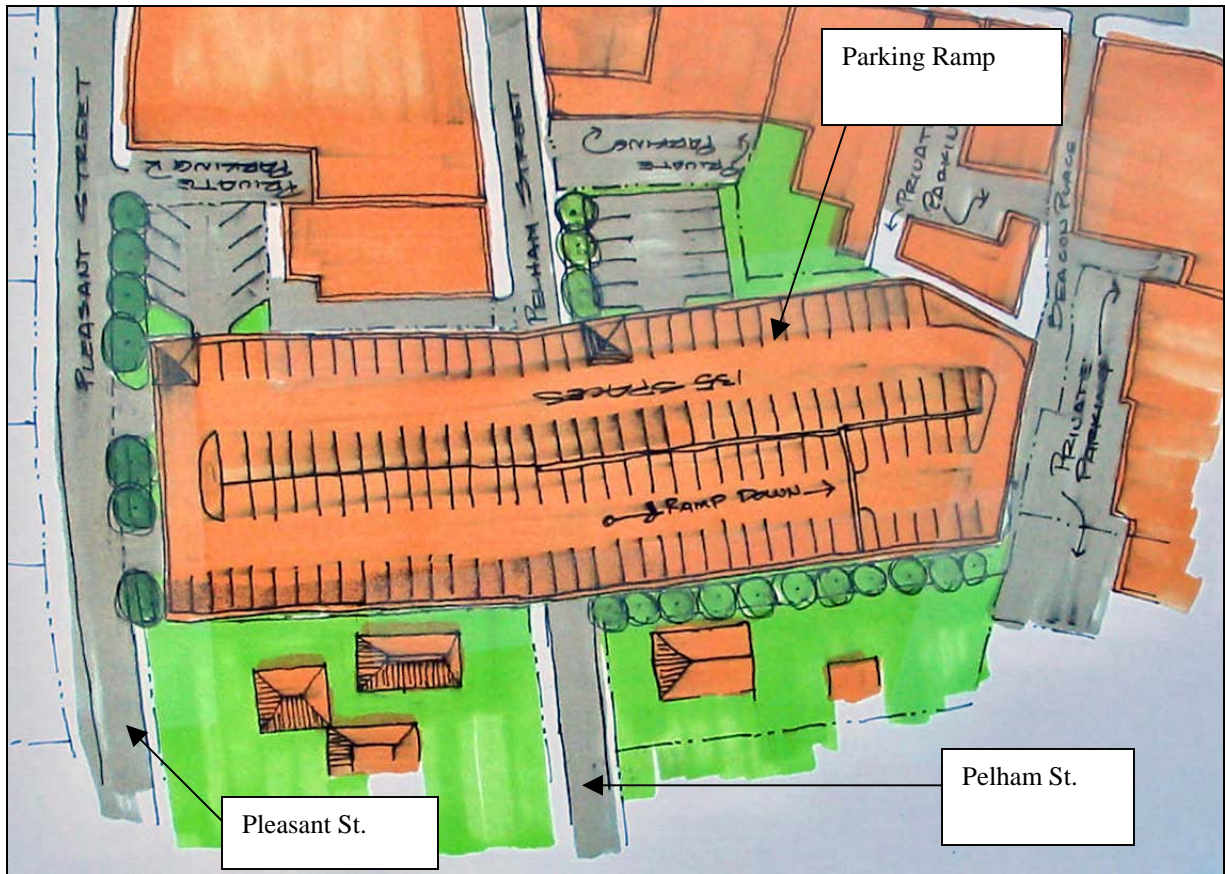
Cypress Street/Herrick Road Parking Structure



Some Examples of Well-designed Parking Structures

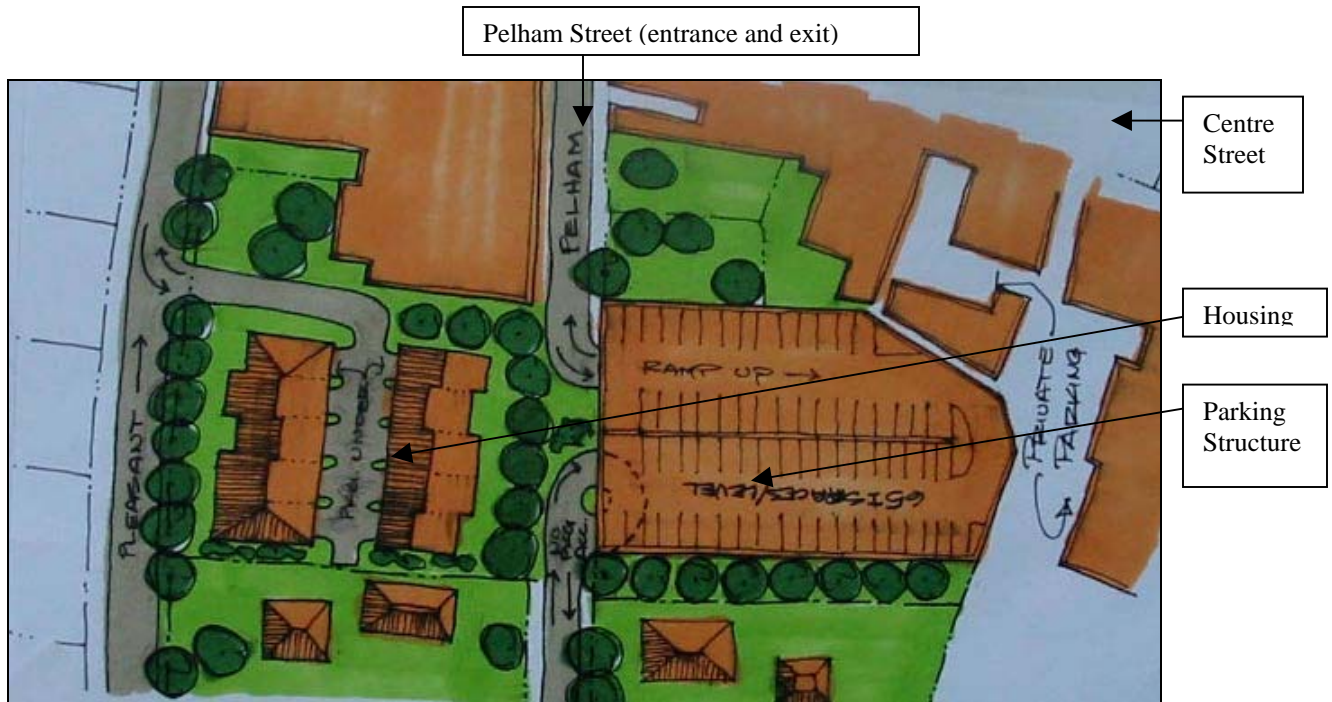
Pelham/Pleasant Street Parking:

A two-level structure spanning the public lots on the north and south side of Pelham Street could provide approximately 400 spaces which is an increase of 250 spaces over the existing surface parking. Special care must be taken to make sure that changes to use or configuration of these properties are sensitive to neighborhood interests. The westerly portion of Pelham Street could be a cul-de-sac or remain open as it currently is.



Possible Parking Ramp on City Owned Property Currently Used for Surface Parking

Alternatively, a parking structure could be built south of Pelham Street and the current surface parking north of Pelham Street could be used for housing. A structure of less than 30 feet in height south of Pelham Street could provide 200 to 250 spaces in 3-4 levels; placing one level underground would further decrease its scale. There is ample space to include a small landscape buffer adjacent to residential property. The westerly residential portion of the street could be returned to a two-way street with a cul-de-sac abutting the parking structure and guest parking for residences also could be provided at the turnaround or in a portion of the parking structure. Pedestrian access would be provided for residents. If parking is consolidated on the Pelham Street site, then the Pleasant Street lot could be converted to two-story housing units as a transition to the commercial area on Centre Street.



Possible Pelham Street Parking Structure and Housing

Centre Green Street Parking

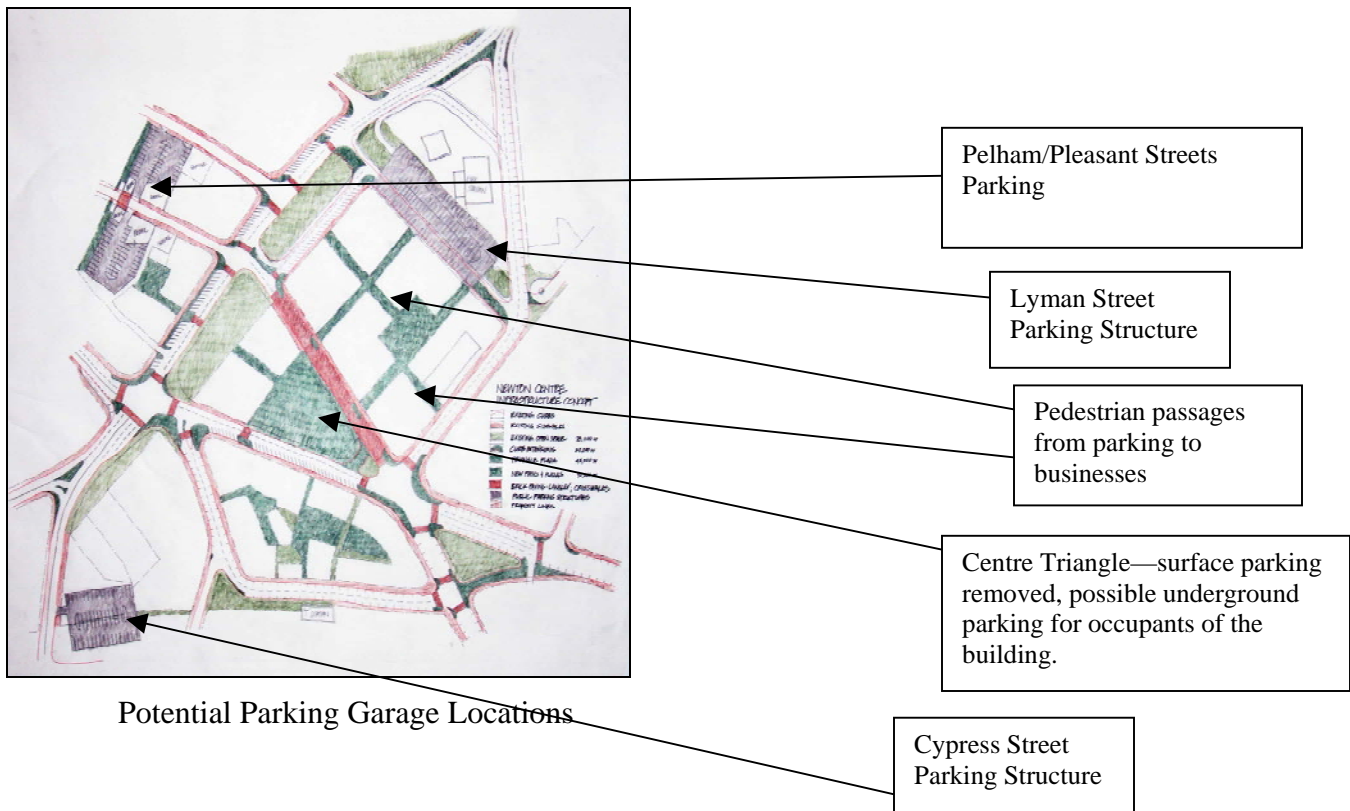
Centre Green Street and the adjacent open space has been considered as a possible place for providing underground parking. It is close to the shops, and would be convenient for both shoppers and employees. Disruption to the grounds would occur during construction under the green but would be restored to its original condition afterwards. Despite the fact that this land has been altered in the past, state and local laws protect this City Park with historic significance. Therefore, State and local approval would be required to pursue this option. A key question is whether the laws that apply to activities on the ground also preclude improvements beneath it, even if the land is restored to its original condition after construction. Another problem with this site is its size. It is probably not large enough to make an underground parking facility economically feasible.

Centre Triangle Underground Parking

Parking under the Centre Triangle is an option that has been discussed at length. There are considerable advantages to the site because of its proximity to shops and the proposed new public space above it. Because of its central location an underground garage would probably be used for short-term parking, although an underground site of several levels is not ideally suited for this purpose. It would continue to draw drivers looking for parking into the central area of Newton Centre. It is not certain, in view of unknown geologic conditions, how costly such a project would be. Approximately 90-95 spaces can be provided per floor on two floors, but due to space limitations access from the street would be difficult. Nevertheless, if the users of the Centre Triangle building want to build and pay for parking in the basement, that possibility could be considered.

Other locations

Additional parking is recommended in strategically-placed public facilities where the spaces can be shared. Parking structures that serve many uses reduce the overall need for individual businesses to provide parking and use available land more efficiently. City-owned lots and other public properties are especially appealing sites because they do not require acquisition costs and generally are already well situated for local parking needs. At the present time, there is demand for parking throughout the center, so distributing it evenly and/or providing structures where demand dictates is desirable. As properties become available, particularly in the eastern part of Newton Centre, the city should consider purchase of land for possible future parking.



Recommendations on Parking:

We believe that additional street parking can be created, some of it by relying on diagonal parking. However, it is unlikely that sufficient street parking adjacent to the business district can be obtained to replace all of the parking displaced from the Triangle, and to provide for growing needs as business and cultural activities in the Centre expand. We also want to reduce commercial/commuter parking in present residential areas. The objective is to concentrate short-term parking in the central areas and to provide adequate long-term parking in the periphery of the Newton Centre business area.

- Street parking spaces should be time limited to accommodate short-term parkers. Strict enforcement and substantial fines will assure turnover of these short-term spaces so that the ample parking will be available at all times.

- **Parking structures suitable for long-term parking will be required. Suitable locations for parking garages located on the periphery of the Centre are identified. All have advantages and disadvantages and all will require negotiations with public agencies and/or private property owners. Subsurface foundation and utility conditions will have to be evaluated.**
- **A location for parking on the eastern side of the Centre has not been identified. It is important for the City to monitor property uses and potential property sales in this area to acquire land if it should become available for a future parking site. It may also be possible to work with existing owners to develop a parking structure as part of the redevelopment of the owners' property.**

Our Groups suggest the construction of two parking structures on the periphery of the Centre. Such structures could be managed professionally and supervised by a newly created Parking and Traffic Advisory Group.

A number of alternative sites for a parking structure have been considered. In the short run, the most feasible sites are on Lyman Street, Pelham Street and on Cypress Street next to or partially over the MBTA tracks.

Present Newton regulations, which require on-site parking, limit what can be built in Newton Centre. These regulations need to be changed to permit arrangements for off-site parking. Shared use of parking spaces between groups with different time schedules also needs to be encouraged.

VIII. TRAFFIC

Newton Centre is located at the crossroads of two major roads and an MBTA Station. The roads have historically served to bring citizens to Newton Centre and as direct routes to surrounding communities. There is no alternative to this historic role but mitigating its negative impacts is possible. The confluence of through and local traffic contributes to major backups at intersections and makes it difficult and hazardous for pedestrians to walk from one business block to another. Congestion and wait-time at intersections in Newton Centre encourage drivers to bypass these intersections whenever possible, creating "cut-through" traffic in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

While it may not be possible to reduce the volume of through-traffic, rerouting of traffic, rationalized parking, improved signaling, selective lane additions, pedestrian crossings, signage, and the creation of roundabouts may make the volume of traffic less burdensome and may improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian circulation.



Newton Center Today: Traffic blockage on Beacon Street

We support a comprehensive study of the efficacy of using roundabouts at the two major Beacon Street intersections in Newton Centre to calm traffic but keep it moving. In addition, if roundabouts are not feasible or possibly in addition to these measures, Group Two and Three examined other traffic options.

Possible Round About in Newton Centre



Other possible changes to calm traffic

Numerous other possibilities to smooth the flow of traffic can be implemented. Many of these possibilities are listed here:

- Changing direction of some one-way streets, for example, Langley Road between Sumner and Centre and Sumner Street between Lyman Street and Beacon Street. Review of traffic circulation revealed that fire engines heading south from the station on Willow Street typically circle the block and go down Langley Road. If Lyman were to become a one-way street to accommodate more parking, the streets could allow circulation in a single direction and good access to all points along the way.
- Bulb-outs and an elevated crosswalk on Beacon Street next to the driveway at the Post Office; bulb-outs or a mini roundabout at Gibbs Street
- Landscaped boulevard for pedestrians to stop in mid street and to visually narrow the lanes of travel on Centre Street between Beacon Street and Sumner Street
- Change paving material on crosswalks at roundabouts on Beacon Street at Langley and Centre Street
- Raised mid-block crosswalk and planters or decorative fencing along the Centre Triangle to direct foot traffic across Langley Road
- Elimination of the merger of Centre and Cypress Streets by 1) separating the two streets with a landscaped median from the point of merger to the proposed roundabout at Beacon/Centre Streets; 2) installing a traffic signal where Cypress and Centre streets converge; or 3) installing a mini-roundabout
- Live parking only on Union Street in front of the MBTA stop from 4:30 – 6:30 pm to reduce double parking and encourage drop off at the “T”. Live parking on Braeland Avenue adjacent to the MBTA from 4:30 – 6:30 to reduce demands for drop-off and pick-up on Union Street
- Long-term meters on Braeland Avenue to encourage merchant use of spaces and free spaces on Union Street so customers don’t need to circulate as much to find parking.
- Additional traffic signals and/or improved signal timing.



Curb bulb-out for traffic calming

Recommendations on Traffic: Our Groups suggest:

- **Additional professional traffic studies to analyze how traffic flow can be smoothed, how pedestrian crossings can be made easier and how traffic can be kept out of the adjacent residential areas.**
- **Further consideration of the construction of roundabouts at the intersection of Beacon and Centre Streets, and at the intersection of Beacon Street, Sumner Street, and Langley Road.**
- **The removal of surface parking from the Centre Triangle to reduce traffic congestion and smooth traffic flow in the central area of the village.**
- **Additional one-way streets, mid block pedestrian crosswalks, landscaped medians in Centre and Beacon Streets, and traffic-smoothing devices.**

IX. PEDESTRIAN PASSAGEWAYS

In addition to improved traffic, pedestrian passageways are needed to improve Newton Center's "connectivity".

There are two large blocks in the Centre--the block bounded by Langley Road, Sumner, Lyman and Centre Streets and the block bounded by Beacon, Herrick, Union Streets and Langley Road. Public paths through these blocks are needed to enable pedestrians to go conveniently from place to place, and, in particular, to walk from the T station to the Langley/Lyman block, and walk from the future Lyman parking facility to the shops surrounding the Triangle.

These pathways would also provide additional frontage for residences over shops and restaurants, along passages and around courtyards adding to the retail inventory and variety that will improve Newton Centre as an attractive place to shop and dine. These locations will also begin to replace retail store square footage lost to other uses and will increase the supply of available space suitable for small businesses. The pictures below show some possibilities for the pedestrian paths and plazas.



In earlier days, Newton Centre had considerable housing above ground-level retail stores. Over the years, housing has been converted to office space or torn down. Today, Newton Centre lacks housing options. The growing population of older “empty nesters” and younger apartment seekers has increasingly been forced to look for housing in other parts of Newton or elsewhere. Developers have been creating condos and rental apartments on Route 9, Needham Street, and elsewhere, but there's a missing element, namely housing for those who desire to live right in the heart of the community with its conveniences and vitality. When people live near the various services they want (food, entertainment, banks, clothes, cleaners, for example), they are less dependent on cars, their environmental impact is less. They become more socially integrated as individuals. There are more people onto the sidewalks; they provide customers for the businesses and “eyes on” safety to the area.

Newton Centre with shops and public transportation will make a good residential center. Adding residents would enliven the Centre, improve business and encourage greater use of its highly accessible public transportation. New housing will help to meet goals of diversity, affordability and reduced reliance on fossil fuels. Moderately greater residential density will help to meet Newton’s goals for affordable housing with minimal impact on village scale.

Newton Centre is particularly suitable for condominium and apartment housing, as it is one of the few places in the City where one can live without owning a car. In this connection, the City should seriously plan establishing Newton Centre as a “Smart Growth” zoning district so that the City, like 30 other Massachusetts cities and towns, can receive state incentive payments for a mixed income residential development.

What Is Preventing Change?

Newton’s city zoning regulations date from the 1920’s and 1940’s and supported what the public wanted at that time. Then, having a modern single home with a yard was preferred. Older multi-family buildings (such as those in Newton Centre) reminded people of depression and war struggles. Energy was cheap and shopping by car to one-story shopping centers with lots of parking places were the preferred land-use model. Today, with two-worker households, increased traffic, and environmental awareness, we have changed our image of the future -- less urban sprawl and wasteful consumption. Building height restrictions in Newton were and still are 24 feet, with the thought of ground-floor shops and second storey dentists and other offices. Parking is required “on-site” even if building sites are too small to accommodate parking.

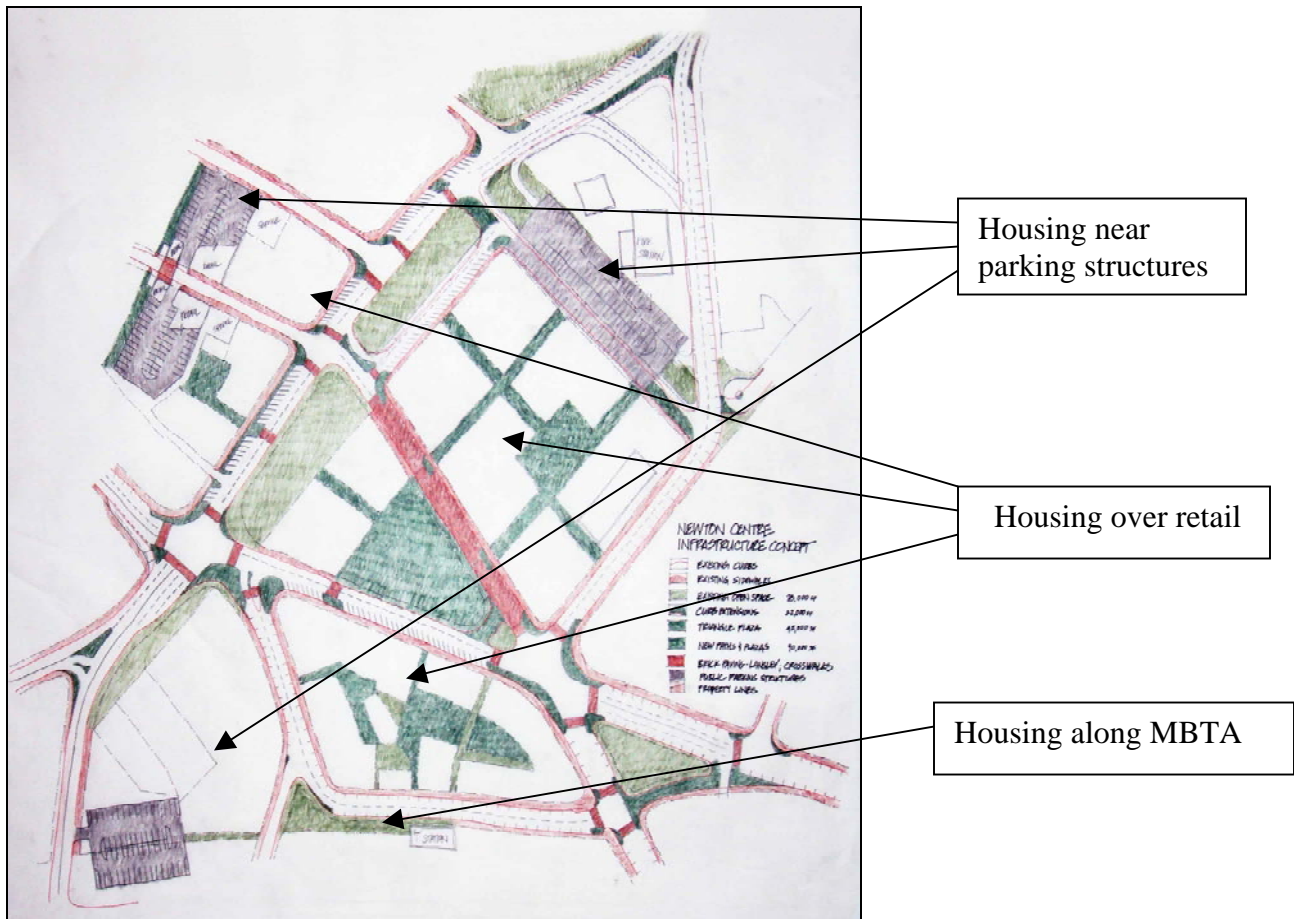
While housing is allowed under current zoning regulations, height and parking restrictions mean that owners have little incentive to upgrade their properties or to build moderate scale residential buildings in Newton Centre core business area. Securing special permits is costly. Yet, today’s urban planning suggests the need for a moderately higher scale, integrating multi-family housing with locally-oriented business. This would also serve to meet growing housing needs of populations that are now badly served— young people, seniors—and would help to meet affordable housing target.

Housing Potentials in Newton Centre

A number of areas in the Centre are well-suited for the construction of housing. While it would be unrealistic to replace offices with housing, residential space can be created in low rise ground level sites, above commercial business, and above parking facilities. The scale of these buildings should be moderate, varying from up to 60 feet in the central areas and somewhat lower scale adjacent to existing residential blocks.

Potential sites shown on the map below are:

- Above ground floor business in newly constructed structures on the Langley of Street block
- Over business along Center and Beacon Streets
- In association with parking structures on Cypress Street or along Lyman Street and the Fire Station block.
- Along the MBTA (or over the tracks) on Union Street (a row of town houses)
- In the present location of parking between Pleasant and Pelham Streets.



Potential Location for Housing



Housing over Retail



Housing on an Interior Plaza

Additional housing in Newton Centre's business area would be advantageous from an economic and fiscal perspective. It would provide opportunities for improving the utilization of space in the business area. It would add local business activity. Since the likely occupants of apartments or condos are young adults or empty nesters, both without school age children, the housing will bring in more tax revenue than fiscal expenditures.

Newton's Comprehensive Plan, approved by the Board of Aldermen in November, 2007, suggests that the City refine the zoning rules that presently impose restrictions on residential uses and village centers and other business areas, at the same time assuring that concerns with regard to traffic, parking, and affordability are carefully addressed.

In May, 2008, The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (of which the City of Newton is a voting member) adopted a long-term regional growth plan for eastern Massachusetts which forecasts 350,000 new households by 2030. This plan, known as MetroFuture envisioned sustainable growth, where these new households are targeted towards infill village center locations with easy access to public transit. From both a physical and environmental perspective this approach is far preferable to uncontrolled sprawl, which results in loss of green space, increased infrastructure costs, longer commutes and water runoff problems. Additional housing in Newton Centre is in full alignment with this

regional plan which is also strongly supported by state initiatives such as the 40R and 40S Smart Growth housing programs.

Recommendations on Housing

Our Groups suggest adherence to the Comprehensive Plan's long-term goal of up to 150 additional housing units created by the private sector and satisfying demographic needs of young and older residents. Studies of site use in Newton Centre suggest that there is room for additional housing without creating excessive density. The plan should encourage new construction for residential above ground floor commercial or parking facilities. We urge clarifying the permit process and providing more flexible ways for property owners to meet building height and tenant parking requirements.

As the Newton Comprehensive Plan states:

"Residential development that is well located in relationship to schools, commercial services, large employers and existing patterns of residential type and character benefit the City in multiple ways...Housing retained or developed in or near village centers supports village businesses, and having a broad array of village services within walking distance benefits residents. That linkage strengthens the vitality and quality of life for the (entire) area."

XI. DESIGN GUIDELINES

Our Groups suggest Design Guidelines for the Public as well as the Private Realm. This document outlines improvements to public property -- such as streets, sidewalks, and parks -- that should be initiated by public agencies to enhance the pedestrian experience in Newton Centre. However, we also strongly believe that these public improvements will spur improvements to private property as well. Since the individual property owners (or a group of owners working together) must do the work on their own property, it is equally important to outline Design Guidelines for the Private Realm.

In Newton Centre today, there is not one central architectural theme. Building heights, construction materials, façade treatments and private signage vary greatly. This eclectic character can provide for a visually pleasing and interesting streetscape. Design Guidelines need not discourage this variety, but can foster it. Identical buildings and façades would make the Centre look drab and boring -- similar to a generic strip mall rather than the diverse commercial center it should be. Instead, Design Guidelines can and should give private property owners ample leeway to creatively design buildings and façades that contribute to the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the Newton Centre streetscape.

Sidewalk widths, light fixtures, site elements, and landscape treatments also vary greatly throughout the Centre. In many locations, on-street facilities are poor and maintenance has been inadequate. While we propose the need for attractive design guidelines, we do not suggest adherence to a particular style. However, we visualize requiring the use of high quality materials and conformance to the latest design standards. The streetscape should be attractive, suited to safe and convenient pedestrian passage, with wider

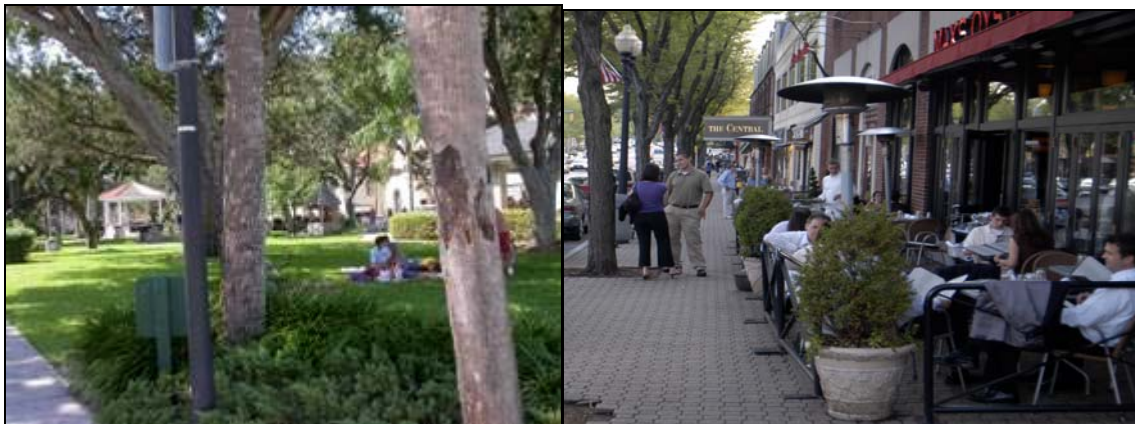
sidewalks, underground utilities, and improved lighting. Design standards should conform to the latest proposals for efficient energy use.

Potential Design Guidelines

The Subcommittee on Design Guidelines considered a broad range of possibilities with regard to design guidelines for Newton Centre. These are intended to assure that public and private improvements conform to the most advanced, highest quality standards.

General guidelines to be followed throughout Newton Centre are vital to contribute to the creation of an interesting and pedestrian-friendly streetscape in Newton Centre. For example, a uniform setback from the street encourages pedestrians to easily walk along the sidewalks peering into shop windows and to stop when something catches their eye. Courtyards filled with plantings, furniture and adequate lighting, tucked behind or between buildings provide a pleasant respite for visitors to the Centre. These areas would pleasantly compliment the public parks and open spaces in the Triangle and along Centre Street.

The purpose of these guidelines (a possible draft for Newton Centre is included in the appendix) is to encourage building designs that are compatible with each other and their surrounding environment. Among the issues that should be addressed in the Guidelines are the site plan or where the building is located on the lot, minimum and maximum building heights, façade treatments, and signage.



Suitable Outdoor Spaces

The Design Guidelines focus on:

Streets and Sidewalks: Well-designed streets and sidewalks are vital to the success of Newton Centre. While it is important to preserve ease of vehicular movement, particularly along Beacon and Centre Streets, Newton Centre is also a destination point and the heart of a residential community. It should be a place where people feel they can easily walk between businesses, parks and shops. Street and sidewalk design should support the objective of making a pedestrian-oriented environment. Roads, particularly the wide Centre and Beacon Streets, should be safe and easy to cross.

Buildings: The streetscape is defined by the buildings that frame it. The types of building materials used and the way they are detailed will enhance the appearance of the architecture and the pedestrian experience. Facade treatments, dormered windows and/or recessed upper stories often make a large building appear less massive at the street level. Buildings should be compatible throughout the Centre, but need not be of the same design, the same height, nor constructed with identical materials.

A new building on the Triangle should be designed to be an icon for the new Newton Centre and a source of pride and excitement for Newton Centre's residents. As such, the building must be carefully designed with a high level of quality materials, proportion, and timelessness. A predominance of glass would express an airy, transparent, contemporary, and inviting image, while anchors of masonry would recognize its solidly-crafted neighbors and pay deserved homage to the former Mason School. A design competition may be an appropriate first step for development of the Centre Triangle.

Pedestrian Walkways and Alleys: Pedestrian walkways and alleys provide smaller scale routes for pedestrians to navigate the Centre. They should be well lit, safe, and pleasant.

Lighting and signage: In addition to providing security, decorative light fixtures and signage help to establish the character of Newton Centre.

Street Trees: Street trees enrich the appearance and health of an urban environment. Trees shade the streets, sidewalks and buildings, mediate the scale between taller buildings and pedestrians, reduce noise and pollution, and provide shelter for pedestrians.



Design Features

Recommendation on Design

Our Groups seeks the highest design qualities on private and public properties redeveloped in Newton Centre. All aspects of design must be considered. The design guidelines must be integrated with the zoning overlay district. A design competition may be appropriate to ensure that the centre triangle will fulfill its possibilities.

XII. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Numerous groups in Newton support improvement in environmental sustainability, efforts to manage development and new construction in ways that will reduce our impact on the environment. The Subcommittee on Environmental Sustainability has proposed a detailed plan of incentives to persuade developers to increase the use of environmentally friendly development. (See the report in the Appendix). While it is not the direct purpose of the proposals to renovate Newton Centre to improve the global environment, there is broad agreement that growth in Newton Centre should be consistent with modern environmental guidelines.

Our Groups support the existing national code named Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). Although LEED was created in pursuit of a noble goal that we share, it is extremely complicated and provides no incentives beyond formal recognition of expensive efforts. Rather than awarding potential developers abstract LEED certifications, we wanted to entice them with the prospect of building larger structures and thus making greater profits in exchange for building energy efficient structures.

Also, we kept in mind that small and medium size construction companies and home owners cannot afford LEED certifications even if they wanted to build energy efficient structures. In order to allow them to do that, we wish to extend these guidelines to all new construction within Newton Centre Revitalization project and, consequently, use them as a prototype for the entire city of Newton.

Existing Conditions:

From the environmental point of view Newton Centre presents the following challenges:

- Most of the existing structures are energy inefficient and create air pollution;
- The existing parking lots don't have enough greenery and create large heat islands;
- Most of the flat roofs have obsolete materials and don't reflect enough solar energy back into atmosphere thus contributing to the heat island effect;
- The area has too much of impervious surface that creates large amount of run-off water which taxes the city's storm sewage system and does not recharge the water table.

Goals:

In order to fulfill our task of creating a vibrant urban habitat in the village of Newton Centre we must amend the current zoning to allow greater density within the designated

boundaries. In order to achieve this goal we will present the Board of Aldermen with a viable solution to the current environmental, economic, social and aesthetic problems of the area. The following proposal concentrates on the environmental issues of that task.

Means:

Encourage sustainable development and sound environmentally practice in Newton Zoning Ordinance. This action will support of the principles of sustainable architecture advocated by the State of Massachusetts, the Green Decade Coalition of Newton, the Newton Conservators and the community of Newton at large. We propose the following:

- Saving and creating open space while accommodating a greater density of new development;
- Reducing energy consumption of each structure;
- Reducing life cycle cost of each structure;
- Incorporating the best practices of new building technology;
- Creating FAR (Floor Area Ratio) incentives for applicants who fulfill the following criteria.

Criteria:

All new construction in Newton Centre shall incorporate, wherever possible, the following basic design principles:

- Orienting a structure's envelope in accordance with the sun and prevailing wind.
- Maximizing a structure's volume to surface ratio.
- Maximizing on-site greenery and open space.
- Active use of solar and wind energy.
- Passive use of solar and wind energy.
- Active use of geo-thermal energy.
- Use of energy efficient heating and lighting.
- Collection of rain water for reuse;
- Use of water saving appliances.

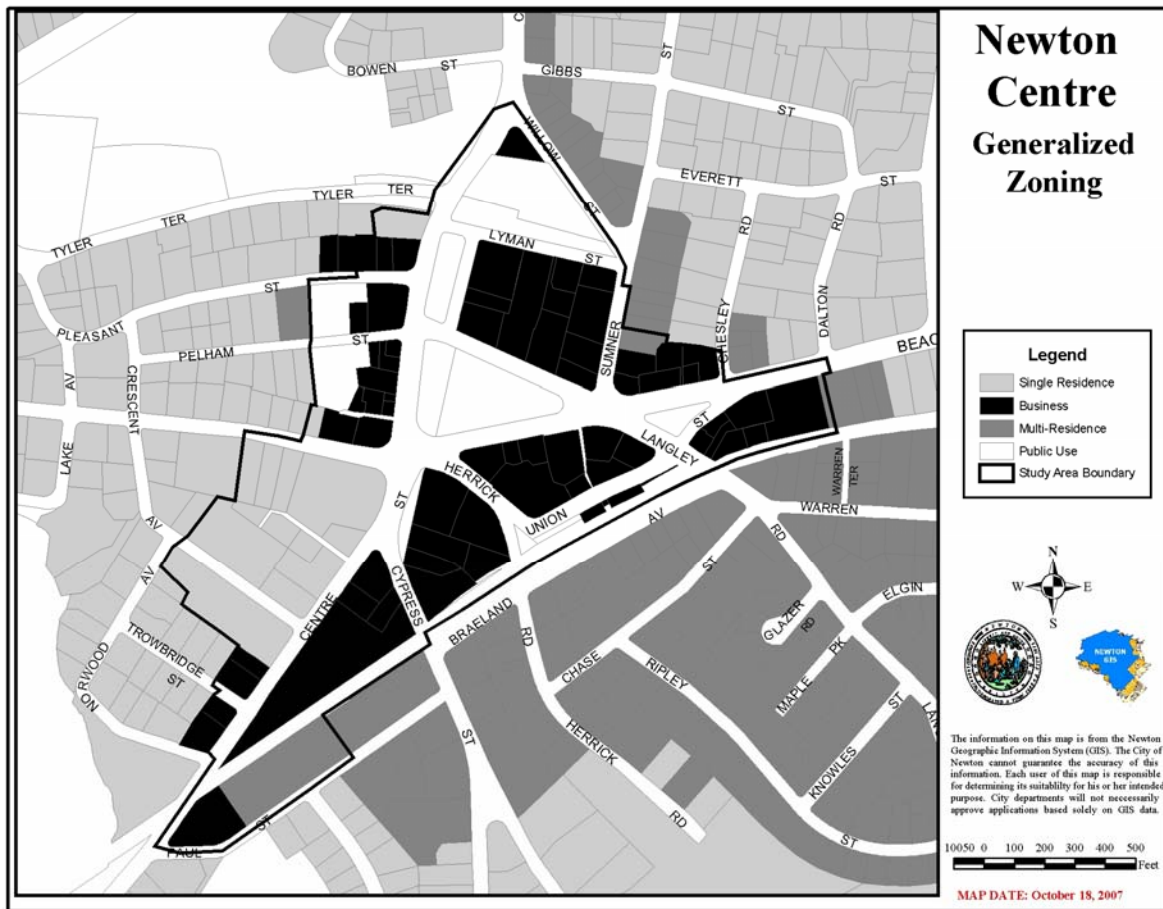
Recommendation on Environmental Sustainability:

We support sustainable environment goals and recommend that measures advancing such objectives be included in the Newton Centre redevelopment effort.

XIII. ZONING AND OVERLAY DISTRICT

Many of the recommendations made earlier in this report can be implemented through the adoption of a Zoning Overlay District. Creating such a zone is one of the items in the Comprehensive Plan's Economic Development Action Program (Comprehensive Plan, pages 6-7).

Currently the underlying zone for the commercial area discussed in this report is either Business 1 or Business 2 (see zoning map below). We do not recommend changing this underlying zone, but would instead establish an overlay on top of the existing zoning. In some cases the overlay zone may be more restrictive than the underlying zone (i.e. allowing banks or offices only on stories above ground level), in others more liberal (i.e. reducing setback requirements). An overlay district could serve a number of purposes:



- Provide a plan tailored specifically to Newton Centre: one size does not fit all. Allow for more development density surrounding the Triangle and less development density on the peripheral blocks adjacent to existing single-family homes.
- Allow for multifamily housing close to rail transit, shops and services, public open space, and social and cultural activities of the community.
- Expand the quantity and increase the variety of retail shops, services, and restaurants.
- Improve the design quality of commercial and residential buildings and related open spaces.
- Reflect and enhance the scale of the historic buildings in Newton Centre.
- Manage parking so that the efficiency of space utilization is maximized, with the most convenient parking available to high-turnover shoppers and visitors, with lower-turnover, employee, commuter, and resident parking in peripheral locations.
- Foster development that improves the long-term fiscal health the City.
- Allow for DIF and smart growth financing.

Conventional *Use-Based* zoning codes regulate which uses are allowed where and have been utilized throughout the country since the early 20th century. Zoning restrictions were initially put in place to separate sometimes-noxious commercial uses from housing and other types of uses. In suburban communities times have changed and the population has grown.

Form-Based zoning codes are a relatively new concept which addresses the relationship between building facades and public space, the form and mass of buildings in relation to each other and the scale and types of streets and blocks. It can regulate development at the individual building scale and often reflects a diversity of architecture, materials, uses and ownership operating within a communal vision and legal framework. Form-based code is presented in diagrams and text. A regulatory plan that designates the appropriate form and scale of development rather than only the land use types is in contrast to the focus of conventional zoning on permissible property uses and control of development through numerical parameters such as FAR, height limits, setbacks and parking ratios.

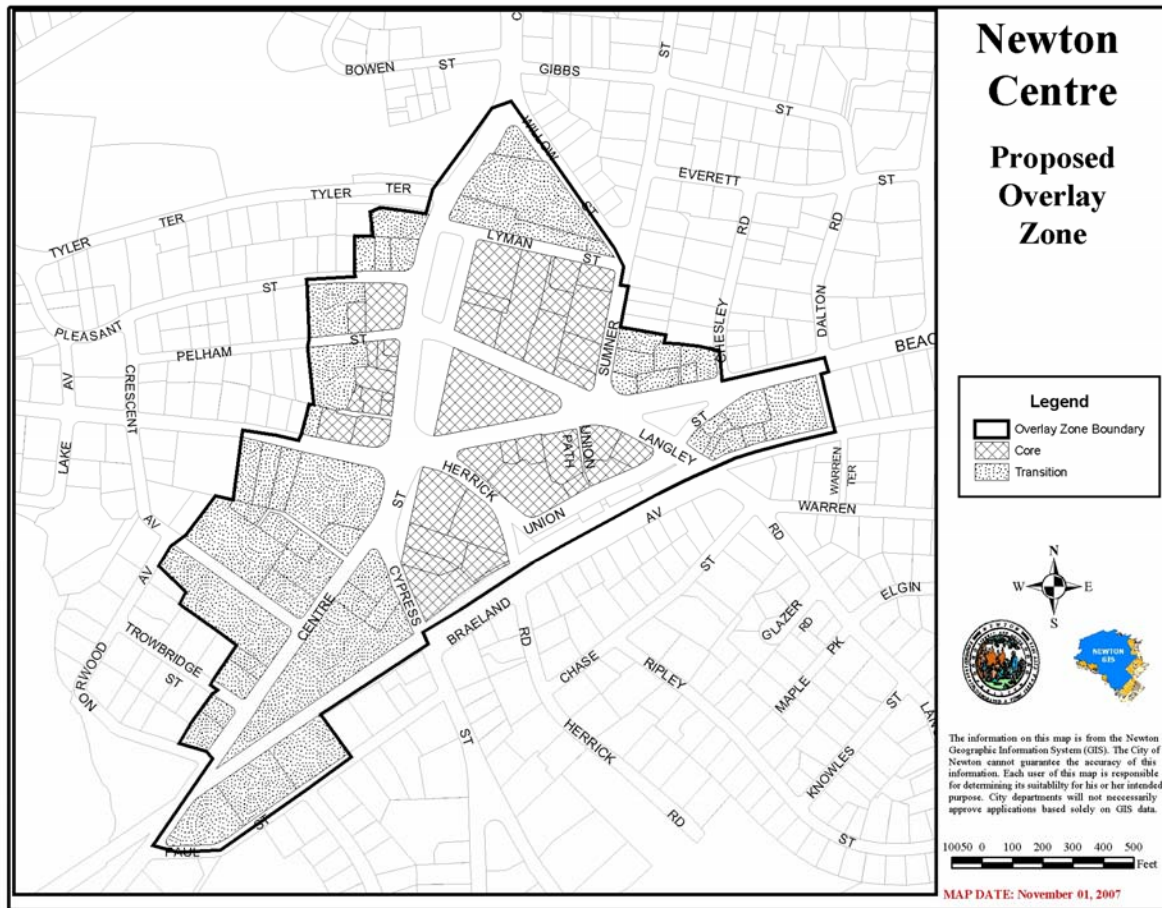
A Newton Centre overlay zone could be a hybrid which includes:

1. Regulating plan or map of the area designating where different building form standards apply
2. Building form standards that regulate the features and functions of buildings.
3. Public space and street standards with specifications for the sidewalks, travel lanes, street trees, benches, etc.
4. Architectural standards which control external architectural materials and quality.
5. A list of uses allowed by-right and by special permit including where these uses may be located.
6. Parking requirements that allow for shared parking on private properties and public facilities.
7. Administration that includes a clearly defined application and project review process.
8. Annotations and definitions to explain the use of technical terms and intention of specific code provisions.

We need zoning that permits mixed use in Newton Centre. An Overlay District would allow us to establish a regulatory plan that designates the appropriate form and scale of by-right development within the Centre. This would allow Newton Centre to achieve the type of development desired. Past experience suggests that the need for special permits has been a barrier to such development. The Overlay District should provide clear guidelines for by-right mixed-use development by property owners. In addition, an overlay District is a requirement for obtaining financing under the DIF and 40R smart growth programs (see Financing Section).

In general, the proposed overlay would include the business areas of the Centre and would divide the area into a Core area, and a Transition area. The core area would encompass property adjacent to the Centre Triangle and furthest away from the existing residential neighborhoods. The Transition area would be designated as the land between the Core and the neighborhoods. Allowable development in the Transition areas should

be less intense than that permitted in the Core in order to provide a buffer for the existing residents. A map of the proposed overlay is shown below.



Zoning Overlay District

Provisions of an Overlay Zone

A sample of an Overlay Zone for Newton Centre, including a comparison of existing and proposed permitted uses and dimensional standards, is included in the Appendix. The following discussion presents some additional possibilities for specifications in an overlay zone.

Land Use

In the core area, to utilize the provisions of the Overlay District, the ground floor of the building must be occupied by pedestrian-oriented, shopping-related land uses including the following:

- Retail shops, cafes, and restaurants
- Residential lobbies, including mailboxes, providing access to upper floor residences.
- Entrances to other business and service establishments and residences located above or below ground level.

In order to better use ground floor space, non-retail uses such as banks, financial offices, medical and dental offices, health clubs, travel agencies, storage facilities, hair and nail salons and spas, and residential uses would be excluded from ground floor locations under the Overlay District provisions. These uses may occupy second floor or basement space, with direct access from a ground floor lobby.

In the transition areas, buildings may have residential use on the ground floor.

Parking

It is important to recognize that Newton Centre is a prime location for transit-oriented development. Fewer parking spaces may be necessary than in parts of the City with no access to public transportation. Our Groups looked at two options to calculate that reduced number.

For example, the first option simply sets new ratios for parking spaces based on land use:

- Residential parking – 1 space per residential unit.
- Retail parking – 1 space per 400 net square feet of retail area
- Restaurant parking – 1 space per four seats
- Office parking – 1 space per 500 net square feet of office area

Another proposal we considered was to reduce the current parking requirement by 35% because the 2000 U.S. Census shows that only 65% of Newton Centre's visitors arrive by car.

We advocate allowing parking spaces to be provided in one of three ways:

- 1) On site
- 2) In common with adjoining properties
- 3) By payment to a City parking fund toward construction of municipally owned public parking facilities in Newton Centre. Payment per space is to be determined by estimates of current construction costs for parking spaces meeting City design criteria.

Building and Site Design

The Private Sector Design Guidelines (sample guidelines in the appendix) should be adopted as part of the Overlay Zone. Private property owners, who would like to take

advantage of the increased density that would be allowed by-right under the overlay, would need to design their projects to follow these guidelines. These guidelines give property owners a range of options for their buildings while ensuring compatibility among all properties in the Centre.

Minimum Lot Sizes and FAR

In an effort to improve the utilization of land, whose ownership is fragmented at this time, minimum project lot sizes are suggested, particularly in the Core area. This may require several owners to undertake joint development projects more suited to the site than small individual buildings. The overlay zone may also include incentives, perhaps an increase in the allowable density (as measured by Floor Area Ratio (FAR)) for development that exceed the requirements in the areas of sustainable architecture and affordable housing or that include a parking facility that is either deeded to the City of available for public use.

Recommendations on Zoning

We support the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations to adopt a zoning Overlay District. We do not recommend changing the underlying Zoning. Rather the Aldermen should approve an Overlay District on top of the existing zoning. The overlay zone should be designed to allow mixed-use structures by-right within specified design guidelines. These guidelines should distinguish between a Core District and a Transitional District.

We believe that Private Sector Design Guidelines should be included in the Overlay Zone to guide appropriate development in the Centre.

XIV. ECONOMICS AND FINANCING

Our objectives are primarily to improve life in Newton Centre and to create a more lively and integrated environment. Economic considerations must influence this project in that it must demonstrate the ability to fund and carry itself. The renovation of the Centre promises to yield substantial economic benefits to local businesses and to the community at large. Substantial costs are involved; however, we estimate that the project will be self-supporting, and that in the long run, it will provide substantial net financial benefit to both to the Newton Centre community and to the entire City of Newton.

Public Expenditures

Capital investment and maintenance requirements to carry out the improvements envisioned for Newton Centre will incur substantial public sector cost. Estimated costs of public improvements to roads, sidewalks, and other public facilities (excluding parking structures) are \$8-10 million. Costs involved in connection with improvements on the Center Triangle--the building, gathering spaces, pedestrian walks, landscaping and fountain will be covered eventually by rents paid by private tenants of the Centre Triangle building. Parking structures are assumed to be self-financing with the parking authority allowed to issue bonds.

In view of the City's difficult financial situation, the revitalization of Newton Centre must be financed without increasing the City's debt burden. As we indicate below, expenditures incurred for the planned public improvements in Newton Centre can be funded from a range of public, private, and non-profit sources.

Potential Sources of Public Financing

1. District Improvement Financing (DIF)

DIF financing is a State of Massachusetts financing program that allows municipalities to borrow funds on the basis of the anticipated increase in taxes resulting from the increased value of newly constructed and redeveloped properties. It can serve as the central financial source that could yield significant dollars for public improvements in Newton Centre. DIF is predicated on a zoning overlay that would permit/encourage greater density and growth in the tax base. The City would define a development district in Newton Centre and would detail the projected improvements. Once the Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) approves the program, the City of Newton would be permitted to finance the public improvements in the DIF District with bonds that are serviced from the anticipated incremental property taxes generated by the improvements in the district. DIF debt is not counted towards the City's municipal debt limit.

Assuming the construction of 150 apartments and 140,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, an increase in tax revenues of approximately \$1.5 million per year can be anticipated. This could support bond issues under the DIF program of some \$15 million (assuming 20-year level amortization).

2. Chapter 40R and 40S (Smart Growth Zoning District):

The proximity of public transportation makes Newton Centre an ideal location for “smart growth” zoning. Provided that a municipality adopts a smart growth zoning district which meets certain requirements, it can apply to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a variety of zoning incentive payments. Under Chapter 40R, incentive payments are made for every by-right unit of housing built over the number allowed in the underlying zoning. A payment of \$200,000 could be received on the basis of planned 150 units of housing plus \$3,000 for each affordable unit built.

Municipalities that incur additional school costs as a result of school children living in new housing within smart growth (40R) zoning districts, may receive additional recurring state funds under Chapter 40S to partially cover these costs.

3. State and Federal Grants including Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Funds

There are a variety of programs/agencies under the Commonwealth Capital Programs, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Transportation that may provide either targeted or general funds for planning the revitalization of Newton Centre. These

funds could support mixed income housing, transportation-related infrastructure, and other grant and loan purposes.

4. Funding of the Parking Facilities:

Our Groups propose the construction of parking structures. Parking structures, which currently cost approximately \$20,000 per space, would require capital investment in excess of \$10 million. Parking structures should be self-supporting. A Parking Authority could issue bonds that would be serviced by parking revenues.

Potential sources of capital and recurring revenues to help finance such improvements include:

- Incremental parking revenues based on increased capacity/utilization of spaces
- Adjusting parking charges to encourage efficient 24-hour use of spaces
- Fees paid by property owners in lieu of providing parking on site
- Rental income from ground floor retail or sale of attached condominium housing.

5. Foundations/Private Donors

A wide array of private foundations, non-profit institutions, and quasi-governmental organizations provide planning and construction funds for downtown revitalizations. For example, the All Newton Music School has previously indicated that it would explore the possibility of relocating into the Newton Centre Triangle building and participating in its funding.

6. Business Improvement District

Subject to municipal approval and support of owners of at least 60% of the property and at least 51% of the assessed value within a proposed business district, Chapter 400 of Massachusetts State Law permits the formation of a Business Improvement District (BID). All property owners within a BID would be assessed a fee not to exceed 0.5% of assessed value. Payment of this fee is voluntary (however the BID requires the minimum 60% levels of support in order to function).

Based on current assessed values and assuming a 70% support level, a Newton Centre BID would generate \$350,000-400,000 per year. Over time, this figure could be significantly higher if one adds the assessed value of improvements that would result from a revitalization of Newton Centre. Funds can be authorized to engage in a wide variety of activities, including capital improvements, maintenance, marketing and promotion. A Newton Centre BID would not only be an important source of funding, particularly for maintenance and for street improvements, but could also provide ongoing resources to recruit desirable retail tenants and organize special events and activities.

7. CPA Funding

Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds can be used for acquisition and creation of public open space and affordable community housing. Funding may be sought for various aspects of Newton Centre reconstruction, particularly in connection with design and

landscaping of the Centre Triangle as recreational space and development of community housing.

8. City Public Works Funding

The City spends substantial money each year on street infrastructure maintenance. Some of the highway and pedestrian improvements planned for the Centre could be fitted into the road maintenance schedule and carried out as part of the Department of Public Works operations.

9. Private Investment

Comprehensive planning for appropriate private development calls for cooperative efforts by private and public developers. Nevertheless, private parties, who will be able to construct mixed-use buildings containing apartments and commercial space under modified zoning regulations, will carry out much of the development we envision for Newton Centre. Private sector development will be justified by the economic gains to the property owners from better use of their properties—mixed use, off-site parking, moderately higher buildings, pedestrian walks, parking garages, etc. Increased pedestrian use of the Centre will also benefit local businesses and provide substantial employment opportunities.

Prediction of the potential development of properties in Newton Centre under an Overlay Zoning District calls for professional engineering and architectural studies.

Recommendations on Economics and Financing

Our Groups suggest that a variety of sources of capital be explored and utilized, private as well as public. Some of these sources, like the proposed BID district will provide only modest sums and may help to provide improved maintenance and landscaping. Other sources, like capital raised by a Parking Authority and funds raised through a DIF program will cover substantial public capital expenditures.

It is anticipated that much of the redevelopment effort in Newton Center will be carried out privately with private financing. An important role of the public sector will be to provide guidelines and incentives so that private financing will be invested in Newton Centre.

Our Groups also suggest that professional studies be conducted regarding prospects for growth, tax revenues, and increased costs associated with the rebuilding and revitalization of Newton Centre. Preliminary studies, conducted by members of the committee, suggest that increases in tax revenues could amount to approximately \$1.5 million per year. Such increased tax potential will support a substantial DIF program that will pay for all of the public improvements, other than the parking structures, which will be financed by self-supporting bonds issued by a parking authority.

XV. MITIGATION

Any discussion of the revitalization of Newton Centre must acknowledge the potential impact on Newton Centre's merchants, shoppers, and on residents of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Gains in improved physical facilities in Newton Centre will inevitably come at the cost of temporary disruptions to people living and doing business there now. A revitalization plan for the Centre without mitigating potential adverse impacts during construction does not serve all the citizens of Newton.

Although any type of change to the existing Newton Centre will impact the *status quo* to some degree, measures can be taken to smooth the transition. Careful advance planning can minimize the disruptive impact of construction on businesses and on the residential neighborhoods that surround the Newton Centre business area.

Provision for parking and for traffic flow during construction is an essential first priority. During the transition process, vehicular congestion can be minimized by rerouting traffic (but not through residential areas). It is also important to provide parking for any parking spaces displaced during the transition and for construction workers and vehicles. Some parking can be provided temporarily by reorganizing the private lots on the Langley Road block.

For maintaining smooth and orderly relations before and during the period of construction, the Centre stakeholders--the local business community and surrounding residential property owners--must be active participants in the planning and mitigation efforts. An extensive outreach program will seek to develop broad participation among all the groups involved.

Recommendations on Mitigation

First, along with other planning activities, a comprehensive Newton Centre Construction Mitigation Plan should be prepared by the Planning and Engineering Departments (and other City departments) in collaboration with Newton Centre business and adjoining residential property owners.

Second, our Groups suggest that prior to the start of a project, all construction projects, public as well as private, must be required to submit project-specific Construction Project Mitigation Plans covering the disturbances likely to be caused by their specific project and the specific mitigation efforts proposed.

XVI. GOVERNANCE

The ultimate decision-makers on Newton Centre's future are, of course, Newton's Mayor and Aldermen. To obtain a sharper focus and to increase local participation, a permanent Advisory Commission representing the City and various stakeholder groups could make an important contribution. This group could represent the local community, guide and monitor the progress of the Newton Centre renovation projects, and advise the Aldermen as the project evolves.

Recommendations on Governance

Our Groups suggest the creation of a permanent Newton Centre Advisory Commission, consisting of representatives of the Board of Aldermen, Newton Centre residents, merchants, and property owners. The Commission will serve as the liaison between the City and stakeholder groups in the Newton Centre community listening to concerns and facilitating communication. Working with appropriate departments of the City, the Commission would guide and monitor planning and development, the performance of the zoning overlay district, and public improvement projects. It would work cooperatively with interested parties and private investment groups to coordinate the projects planned for private and public sites. It would make regular reports to the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen.

Our Groups also suggest the creation of a Business Improvement District supported by local businesses. This organization can play an important role in improving the streetscape and in providing ongoing maintenance in the Newton Centre business area.

XVII. CONCLUSIONS

To take advantage of the economic and cultural offerings in Newton Centre and to achieve the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, it is important to take a comprehensive approach.

Making new arrangements for parking, parking structures, and smoothing the flow of traffic through the center are high priorities. A signature building in the Triangle would provide a focus around which village life can be enlivened. A zoning overlay district is recommended to make it possible for property owners to carry out the mixed-use development that is envisioned. The zoning overlay will facilitate financing under a DIF program and will support the growth of housing as envisioned in smart growth planning. A Newton Centre Advisory Commission can work with city planners, business and local residents to guide future development.



A Vibrant City Center

XVIII. AN ACTION PLAN FOR NEWTON CENTRE REVIVAL

An Action Plan put into place by the Aldermen will implement the numerous diverse steps needed to implement revitalization of Newton Centre.

The following is an Action Plan for Newton Centre revival. Some actions must clearly precede others. Priorities are indicated. Many of the recommended steps require simultaneous action on various fronts.

Primary responsibility for implementing the plan will fall on the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen. The proposed Newton Centre Advisory Commission, reporting to the Mayor and the Aldermen, will serve as a coordinating body, assuring that proposed plans are implemented and that plans are modified as required by changing circumstances.

The Action Plan

1. Approval in principle by the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen of the Newton Center Task Force Combined Group Two and Three Report.				Formation of Newton Centre Business Improvement District (BID)
2. Appointment of Newton Centre Advisory Commission				
Traffic	Parking	Centre Triangle		BID
3. Appointment of Parking and Traffic Advisory Group and/or Parking Authority		Planning for Centre Triangle and Building Possible design competition. Professional financing study.		Village maintenance and programs plan
4. Traffic study	Parking Plan	Establishment of a District Improvement Financing program (DIF)		Beginning of Village maintenance and programs
5. Planning of street improvements	Construction of Parking Structure(s) and temporary mitigation lots			Approval of off-site parking for business and housing
6. Construction of roundabouts and curb improvements and pedestrian ways	Elimination of Parking from the Triangle	Site clearance	Fund raising for Triangle improvements	Cooperation with private property owners on planned construction
7.		Construction of Centre Triangle building and fountain	Private construction	
8. .Newton Centre as an exciting, busy, revitalized village center				

If we fail to take actions now, future growth in Newton Centre is likely to repeat the helter-skelter development patterns that are responsible for Newton Centre's present situation. It would not be realistic to assume that quick superficial actions will result in permanent improvement. If we act responsibly now, we have the opportunity to re-create a vibrant, attractive, and pedestrian-friendly village center.